

明血約のリヴァニア

丈月
Takeduki Joe
城
志有村仁

VII



The Leviathan of the Covenant

明里約のリヴァイアサン

丈月城

Takeduki
Joe

illust: 仁村有志

VII





ふふふふ。

やつと素直に

なってきたのね、ハリーー♪

どう?

だんだん気持ちよく

なってきたんじゃない?

あ……まあ、

なんだろう……うん





白坂 羽純
&
水無月

ルナ
&
グリンダ

Chapter 1 - September Revolution

Part 1

"How boring—"

Luna Francois Gregory sighed.

"The plan is proceeding smoothly without any impediments at all. And to think that I painstakingly prepared countermeasures ahead of time to win over various people involved with SAURU in the Kantou region, for the purposes of poaching, tempting, bribing, negotiating, intimidating, threatening or extorting personnel."

"Miss Gregory, I believe it is a good thing for the plan to be proceeding smoothly."

"Of the countermeasures you listed, isn't the latter half somewhat problematic in character?"

Hiiragi Yukari had responded with a cordial smile while Kenjou Genya chimed in casually from the side.

Hiiragi-san was an intellectual beauty with spectacles in her twenties and served as the chief of SAURU's Kantou branch in Japan. In charge of SAURU's Tokyo New Town office, Kenjou was a good-looking man with unkempt facial hair.

The three of them were meeting at Yokohama's Chinatown.

The trio was sitting at the open terrace section of a Chinese restaurant that was a brief walk from the train station.

The dishes on the table not only included staples of Japanese-adapted Chinese dishes like chilli shrimp and mapo doufu but also luxury delicacies such as shark fin soup and abalone steak.

These were ordered by Luna, the master-class witch commanding an extraordinary income.

Yokohama City was the heartland of SAURU's Kantou branch.

Hiiragi Yukari's office was also situated in the city. As an executive of SAURU, Luna Francois Gregory had come to this city to meet face-to-face with members of the organization—

Naturally, this was to discuss clandestine plans.

"Because everyone was so cooperative. 'Are you willing to join us...?' The new organization, the GUILD, formed around Tokyo New Town's witches and Haruga Haruomi, requiring them to quit SAURU depending on circumstances—I can't believe that currently 68% of the Kantou personnel have agreed at the first opportunity."

Luna Francois was holding several A4-size sheets of computer printouts.

Having curled up the stack of paper, she was fanning herself.

It was the name list of hundreds of SAURU members active in the Kantou region. Those who had answered "YES" were crossed out in red.

The papers were marked full of red lines.

In addition, those who consented were enchanted with oath magic, sworn to absolute secrecy.

"I am happy that time was not wasted, but it is rather boring."

"It's only natural for people to decide this way."

"Because everyone at SAURU knows... At this rate, mankind will only continue to suffer under the dragons' oppression, headed on a slow course for destruction."

The master-class witch at the tender age of seventeen—Luna Francois.

As representatives of ordinary people, the two adults, Hiiragi and Kenjou, responded to her tactless lament.

"Whatever, things will soon be getting hectic anyway." Luna pouted with displeasure and used magic.

The list she had been using as a fan suddenly started to burn. Within the blink of an eye, the paper was incinerated into ash by a mysterious flame, disappearing into oblivion.

At the same time, the flame vanished. This was Tinder magic.

The entire process only lasted but an instant, hence nearby people would not notice.

Even had someone noticed, they probably would have convinced themselves it was merely a fire started from a lighter.

Such was the magical power and stylishness of a Level 5 witch, whose skill in even the smallest of magic spells would still dwarf that of weaker witches.

"Looks like there are no issues in the first stage of our plan, 'in any case, let's take over the Kantou region first.' Could you two continue with advance preparations inside the Kantou branch?"

"By the way, don't we need to deal with *that guy*?" Kenjou nodded and asked after receiving orders from Luna.

"That elite dragon has been reported lurking at Tokyo New Town in human form. I remember the first time when he appeared before us Japanese, the location was..."

"In front of the Yokohama Landmark Tower, right?"

Hiiragi Yukari was referring to a super tall building standing at a height of 296m.

As long as the sky was clear, It was possible to see this majestic structure even from Chinatown.

"An entity named Pavel Galad, a false dragon king like Haruomi-kun."

"Leave him be. Or rather, given the current circumstances, we have no choice but to ignore him for now."

Luna showed a serious look on her face for the first time since sitting down in the open-air seating in Chinatown.

The silver dragon, successor to the Rune of the Sword, was a formidable foe who posed a threat to Harry, the boy of her love. He was very likely going to be their biggest obstacle apart from the few dragon kings.

"During the summer vacation, we had the Metropolitan Police Department search New Town but all that turned up were a few eyewitness accounts. If an elite dragon with high intelligence and magical power was truly serious about infiltrating human society, it would be very difficult to root him out... Our long-time worries have now been proven true."

During the summer, Hal and company had gone off on expeditions one after another to Izu, the American East Coast and other places.

With the turbulent vacation concluded a few days ago, September was now rolling around. For high school students like Luna Francois and Haruga Haruomi, it was also the beginning of the second school term.

After returning to Japan from New York, while drafting up plans for the GUILD, Luna and others have not lowered their guard against "the enemies."

The enemies. Countless dragons as well as Pavel Galad.

Most prominently, there was the queen who had declared Tokyo as her territory. The white dragon making her temporary residence at the Old Tokyo Concession, Princess Yukikaze—

President M, a wielder of mysterious powers whom even Luna could not ignore, had issued the following warning.

'I have been feeling uneasy the whole time recently.'

'There is a very strong premonition—Something huge will happen to the city in the near future and might need your party's power.'

Would the cause of a huge incident be Princess Yukikaze? Pavel Galad? Or a dragon previously unencountered?

Regardless, Tokyo New Town's current situation must be very dangerous.

Part 2

"Uwah... This *is* weird after all~"

Funaki-san—Funaki Kyouka—looked at her hand and frowned.

She was sitting in a train, what would be known as commoner's locomotion, taking the New Town Loop Line which circled Tokyo New Town, gazing at the pocket watch she had taken out from her schoolbag.

"It's been like this all the time recently."

This was a old-fashioned pocket watch with a long hand, a short hand, and a hand for indicating seconds.

The watch was just big enough to hold in one's hand. Currently, the three hands were spinning nonstop, like a compass under interference.

This was not Funaki-san's own possession. Her classmate, Haruga Haruomi had lent it to her.

This classmate, reputedly a treasure hunter and a mage for two generations starting from his father, always looking sleepy, had cast a certain spell on his personal pocket watch before lending it to her.

This was Sense Magical Power.

"When something or someone possessing powerful magic is nearby... Or some kind of creature, the tip of the long hand will point directly at the source—I remember that's what Haruga-kun said."

He apparently used this spell for hunting treasure.

Before the summer vacation, Funaki-san had asked him to lend her a "searching tool" so that she would instantly know whenever the silver dragon in the guise of the super handsome guy was nearby.

His answer was "Stealth magic can counter it, so just remember this thing isn't infallible."

However, if the other party were using stealth magic, the hands on the watch would simply *remain still*. *Normally speaking, the hands would not spin nonstop like now.*

This response had started appearing late August.

She had discovered it while strolling around New Town.

"So this means that something weird is going to happen all over Tokyo... Right?" Funaki-san murmured.

'Haruga-kun, are you there? I'm at Class F's homeroom.'

"I'm still in school, killing time on the roof right now," Hal's answer sounded even more lethargic than usual.

It was early September, during the second school term, on an afternoon after lessons were over.

The one calling Hal's cellphone was his classmate Mutou-san. Recently, she had been helping out as a part-time employee with business matters in the founding of the GUILD.

Also, in contrast to Hal, Mutou-san's tone was energetic as always and full of cheer.

'What? That's just upstairs. I'll go find you. Don't go anywhere.'

"You're going to make a special trip?"

'Yes, I need to return the report to you. The collection of dragon trivia that's usually treasured secretly at the Haruga residence.'

"You sure read fast. Didn't I lend it to you only three days ago?"

'Because it's interesting stuff. If possible, please bring me something else to read tomorrow. See you later.'

Mutou-san hung up, so Hal put his cellphone away.

It had probably been two months since he started providing knowledge about dragons and magic to Mutou-san. Extremely thirsting for "knowledge of that sort" to begin with, the classmate read the materials with unexpected speed, reaching a level of comprehension that would put even SAURU members to shame.

I must keep increasing the number of people familiar with this type of knowledge...

Leaning against the railing, Hal thought to himself absentmindedly.

Looking down at the sports field from a height of fifteen meters, he naturally noticed.

"As one might expect... Much fewer than before."

Hal was referring to the number of people hanging around on campus.

Students participating in club activities or on their way home seemed to be fewer than even during the first school term—

This was merely Hal's personal impression, so he could be mistaken. However, it was the truth that after suffering dragon attacks repeatedly, some of Tokyo New Town's residents had decided to "move away or evacuate temporarily."

"Oh, I found you at last. Hello, Haruga-kun."

A voice called out to him from behind.

The telephone conversation had ended less than ten minutes ago and Mutou-san was already here. She was a short-haired girl with plenty of energy in both mind and body.

"Here you go. This is what I need to return to you."

Receiving the documents she handed to him, Hal nodded. "I got it. Then I'll pick out something for you tomorrow."

"Sorry for troubling you all the time. Say, Haruga-kun, are you currently writing that GUILD proposal?"

"Yeah, I even used your opinion for reference, to make a revised version."

"Have you addressed the part that everyone was concerned about? Basically, it would be desirable to have a theme that could serve as the mission statement for the second stage of 'the first stage is establishing the new organization GUILD, while the second stage is to take control of Japan's Kantou region,' something that could represent the organization.***"

"This aspect is still fluid, so there's currently no way to make an official announcement yet."

Hal was quite vague.

"But we have a number of plans prepared behind the scenes. While I was in America, I came up with many different ideas."

"Oh?"

"Well, when the time comes, I'll ask you to help out."

"Understood~ Oh right, on an unrelated note..."

Mutou-san suddenly pointed behind her—The entrance to the school building's roof. The metal door had separated from its hinges and was lying on the floor.

"What's with that door?"

"Oh... During summer, it was malfunctioning a bit and couldn't be opened. I think someone broke it off by force."

"Oh~ And that door was so sturdy too."

Mutou-san widened her eyes, very impressed.

In fact, the hinges were made of metal too. If one were to look closely, they would discover that the hinges were ripped apart by brute force.

Fortunately, Mutou-san did not seem to have noticed.

Smiling, she bid Hal goodbye and left the roof.

"Kukukuku... Even you do not have the guts to admit that you were the perpetrator, huh?"

"Duh? I intend to finish my school life as 'an unassuming male student.' Besides, no one will believe that it was done by someone like me who looks like a weakling."

After Mutou-san left, a young girl in a kimono appeared.

Needless to say, this was the haughty and conceited former dragon king, Hinokagutsuchi. Laughing maliciously, she was looking at the top of Hal's head.

"The wisdom of Ruruk Soun—You are fairly experienced at using it now."

"So-so, I suppose. But this time, even I think I overdid it. This is beyond using a sledgehammer to crack a nut, it's using a sledgehammer to smash a speck of dust."

Someone with magical sight, such as a witch, probably would see five magic symbols on top of Hal's head, releasing potent magical power.

They were runes of Ruruk Soun, different from any language in the world.

The arrangement signified "telekinesis." This was magic for moving objects by emitting mental energy invisible to the naked eye.

—Thirty minutes earlier, Hal wanted to come to the roof but discovered that the door could not be opened. It looked like it had malfunctioned over the summer break.

Hal originally thought of giving up, then an idea occurred to him.

Could the telekinesis magic used by the first elite dragon he encountered, Raak Al Soth, be applied to this kind of situation?

...The reason why he had used such a mystic technique in this situation was ultimately due to his unease, probably.

Hal and his faction's current position was quite precarious. Even disregarding President M's warning, it was still necessary to be on maximum alert.

In that case, shouldn't Haruga Haruomi get used to "the wisdom of dragons" that he had yet to explore?

Since he did not know when he might need this power...

"Although I accidentally broke the door because I didn't control my strength with enough care—" Hal said quietly. "I feel like praising myself on a job well done, actually. As long as I master this magic, it's definitely possible to uproot the entire school building and suspend it in the air. The power of elite dragons is truly amazing..."

"Hmph. Compared to elites, your current power is closer to the dragon kings."

Hinokagutsuchi did not hide the smile of mockery on her face at all.

"Let alone suspending a building in the air, pulverizing it would undoubtedly be an easy task."

"Sheesh... Whatever, looks like there's no problem. It's time for me to leave. I still need to meet with Luna and the others."

"Oh?"

Hal shrugged and the eyes of the former queen of dragons instantly brightened up.



"Will the little lass with the big appetite be there?"

"No, but one of either Juujouji or Shirasaka will come. Hii—the adults on good terms with us might be present too. What's it to you?"

"Nothing of consequence. Just do your work, brat."

Hal turned his back to the maliciously smiling Hinokagutsuchi and walked to the entrance that was missing a door.

His expression was lacking in motivation and passion, the same as usual. However, Hal was feeling quite anxious inside.

Hii____. Ke____.

He could not recall the names of the two adults who were on very good terms with his group.

What a disgrace to be so forgetful at the young age of sixteen. Pretending nothing had happened, Hal took out his cellphone and swiftly operated the touchscreen to check his contact list.

Oh right. Hiiragi-san and Kenjou-san.

Hinokagutsuchi's sharp gaze was stabbing into Hal's back.

Just before leaving, Hal glanced back, only to see the self-styled devil in the guise of a young girl seeing him off, gazing at him gently as though she were observing the ecology of an exotic beast.

Part 3

After Hal left the roof of the school building, three hours went by all at once.

The venue for his meeting with his companions was a suite in a luxury hotel. Luna Francois' room.

He came here from school, but—

"...So as things stand, Harry, SAURU's Kantou branch is practically standing on our side. Young and possessing the power of dragonbane, our ability to gather support is far higher than those conservative Grandmas at the Salem headquarters."

"I-I see. Yeah, not surprising..."

After listening to Luna's report, Hal replied stiffly.

He was lying on a bed so large that having just one person sleeping in it would be a waste.

He was not relaxed. In fact, it was the opposite. His voice was high-pitched and his entire body was stiff from tension.

"Although they contributed to SAURU in the past, those Grandmas' policy... 'Not letting commoners know of the existence of magic and witches' is far too behind the times."

"Yeah. It's only because they used to be irreplaceable."

In contrast, Luna was very calm.

"More importantly, Harry, how are you feeling right now?"

"A-Awkward, I guess, or maybe uncomfortable..."

"Just relax your body. Let yourself go and leave everything to me."

Luna Francois was speaking in a sultry yet calm voice.

She was sitting on the same bed that Hal was lying on, resting his head on top of her soft thighs.

Apart from that, Luna was using a wooden ear pick, gently cleaning Hal's ear canal.

"How is it? Is it getting more and more pleasurable?"

"Ah... Well... Yeah."

"Fufufufu. Harry, you're finally being honest♪"

Luna's service was not limited to ear cleaning.

She was dressed in a purple China dress, apparently bought from Yokohama's Chinatown.

Famous for the way it accentuated a woman's curves, it clung tightly to Luna Francois' magnificently well-developed body.

Hal thought back to thirty minutes ago.

'My apologies, but I cannot go today.'

'Sorry, Senpai, please send my regards to Luna-san.'

Soon after entering Luna's room, Hal received these two texts.

They came from Juujouji Orihime and Shirasaka Hazumi respectively. Hal dared to visit the room of the boldly affectionate Luna only because he heard they were coming along.

He had not expected to be alone with her.

Furthermore, Luna was dressed in an extremely seductive China dress.

Just as Hal felt his heart rate rise, Luna told him to sit on the bed. He obeyed on reflex then—

'By the way, Harry, I have a great idea!'

Thus, Luna started to clean his ears. Unable to refuse, he was stuck and the situation unfolded to this point.

Perhaps he should have acted like a man to refuse her with determination.

However, one could hardly blame him. Because Luna had tearfully begged him "if you don't let me clean your ears, my motivation to work might be gone irrevocably" in practically a threat. As a high school boy, trying to reject the temptation of a beauty in a China dress was truly a tough challenge...

"How are things on your end?" Luna suddenly inquired. "Haven't you been contacting people involved in Tokyo New Town's efforts to resist dragons?"

"Yeah."

The gentle movements in his ear felt more and more comfortable.

More importantly, Luna's soft thighs were perfect in temperature. Savoring the indescribable sense of satisfaction, Hal said, "I asked Juujouji's grandfather for a favor... to let me contact some of the sponsors of witches in New Town and the Kantou region."

So-called sponsors made up the "committee" that funded witches and leviathan operations.

This included businesses, capitalists, religious organizations, NGOs, and local authorities based in these lands. In fact, as an important figure in certain publicly listed companies, Orihime's grandfather was also a member of this type of committee.

"It doesn't matter whether or not we're part of SAURU. The key point is our ability to assist in defending Tokyo and the Kantou region as before... That's what they said."

"In other words, we're not allowed to take Orihime-san and Hazumi-san away, is that right?"

"Yeah. As long as we agree to this stipulation, they basically don't care if SAURU turns into GUILD—Something like that."

"A verbal agreement alone isn't very reliable..."

"Maybe contract magic can be used for assurance..."

"Leave this to me to handle."

A seductive smile appeared on the corners of Luna's lips in stark contrast to her gentle motions in Hal's ear.

In this area, she and Haruga Haruomi were "birds of a feather" and so could quickly reach consensus. The two of them were not naive enough to easily trust in other people's benevolence and verbal promises.

"Say, Harry... Why are you shutting your eyes?"

"Huh?"

Hal was lying on his side to let Luna clean his left ear.

His other ear and the right half of his face was buried in Luna Francois' thighs. He was keeping both his eyes tightly shut.

"Simply stated, it's so that I won't lose to my own cowardice..."

"What do you mean? Please explain concretely♪"

Luna was questioning Hal in a teasing manner. Her hand did not pause in her ear cleaning motions. Extremely high on the impish attribute, she must have seen right through Haruga Haruomi's mind.

However, Hal would rather die than admit defeat, so he tried to resist.

"Because I'd be at a bit of loss where to look if I opened my eyes."

"There is nothing in this room that you're not allowed to look at, you know? Even Luna Francois in the bath, fully nude, is a sight I will allow you to enjoy for free."

"W-Well..."

"Fufufufu. Harry, look into my eyes. Please."

Luna's voice was incomparably seductive.

She finally stopped her hand and gently caressed Hal's hair.

If he were to lose to this sweet temptation, he would have to offer his soul... These were the devil's whispers. Despite knowing that, Hal ultimately succumbed to temptation.

He opened his eyes and looked up.

This was to gaze upon Luna Francois' lovely face—But there was something obstructing his view.

Ostensibly G-cup by visual estimates, the magnificent bust was in front of him, preventing Hal from seeing the blonde beauty's eyes and face.

Due to Luna wearing a China dress, the size and shape of her bust was clear to see.

Speaking of which, he had experienced something similar before.

It was when he had fainted at an open-air bath in Izu and Orihime had used her lap as a pillow for him to lie on. However, he had closed his eyes instantly back then, so it was hard to say that he truly "saw."

But this time was different.

He stared intently and directly at the view before him, engraving it into his mind concretely.

"Do you know, Harry? If you look at me so passionately... It makes me nervous."

"Ehhh!?"

Hal jumped in surprise due to the suddenness.

"Look."

Luna picked up Haruga Haruomi's left hand and guided him to touch her magnificent bust of cheating proportions.

Badump. Badump. Badump. Badump.

Her heartbeat could be felt through the palm of his left hand.

This was the same heartbeat he had felt a number of times so far when using the sun-shooting divine bow, a technique of assured annihilation.

"How is it? Can you feel... my heartbeat?"

"Y-Yeah."

"Perhaps this isn't bad after all. I could get addicted to this."

"W-What isn't bad?"

"Letting you touch me when it's not battle related. It feels so reassuring. Don't hold back, I allow you to touch me any time, okay?"

"I think I... need to hold back."

"Fufufufu. Harry, you're such a liar."

"W-Why do you say that?"

"Because it's clearly written on your face, 'I don't want to hold back'."

"....."

"Hey Harry, if possible, try to make me more nervous, okay? Also, I'd like to make your heart beat faster and faster so that we pass the same time together."

"We could... play a game or something?"

"Jeez, Harry, you're lying again. Look at your face, you know clearly what we need to do. There's a bed here, we're alone together, and night happens to be falling soon— There is so much time left. Don't you think it's an excellent opportunity?"

"U-Uh, well, what can I say!?"

Hal felt as though he was slowly getting caught in a spider's web.

Things would be bad at this rate. He might fail to resist. For some reason, Juujouji Orihime's face surfaced momentarily in Hal's mind, then he thought of his childhood friend's current residence. Yes, using this as an excuse would be more natural...

"I have an appointment with Asya later. Isn't she living in the suite next to yours? I was thinking now that I'm here already, I might as well discuss things with her too!"

"Oh dear, is that so? What a shame."

Unexpectedly, Luna did not push the issue.

Bringing her lips to Hal's ear, she spoke softly in a gentle voice contrary to her usual diabolical image, "But remember this well, Harry. The door to my room will remain open to you at all times. If you ever feel the need to make memories with Luna Francois, be it midnight, 3am or 4am, come over immediately. Got that?"

Rather than the devil, Luna's words seemed to evoke more of an image of a tender loving goddess.

Hal nodded subconsciously.

"Haruomi, did you take an afternoon nap? Your face looks all energized."

Asya's question made Hal jump in surprise.

He was certain that he had his expression suppressed calmly as usual with no signs of being subjected to temptation in Luna's room just now.

Recently, the silver-haired childhood friend had been quite sharp in unusual areas.

"I didn't take a nap. It's probably because I slept in later than usual today. Now that the plan has entered the execution stage, I have far fewer things to do as the one in charge."

"The color in your face definitely looks better than before the summer break."

Hal picked a safe reason and Asya did not press the matter.

The two of them were taking the New Town Loop Line towards Narihirabashi. This was the station closest to Hal's home. Instead of sitting down, they were standing, Gripping the overhead handhold rings.

It was 7pm on a weeknight but there were few passengers.

"By the way, you don't really need to send me all the way home."

"Why not? I happen to be free. You had a meeting with Luna before coming to find me, right?"

"...Yeah."

"Then let's chat until we reach your house."

"Sure."

"By the way, have you read Funaki-san's report? She said that the magical power detector has had mysterious responses all over New Town."

"Sure enough, it must be that Galad guy or some other dragon, right?"

"Could it be Princess Yukikaze?"

"I don't think the princess would stoop to such silliness."

Hal found it odd when conversing with Asya.

Was his childhood friend, whom he had known for so many years, ever the type to seize initiative when dealing with him?

Asya had been acting weird lately. Her bottomless abyss of a stomach had now become smaller than a normal person's capacity, while her behavior emanated a kind of subtle "femininity"—

When in her company, he could not stop thinking ridiculous thoughts.

Indeed, Asya even kissed him that time in New York.

This had been hanging on Hal's mind ever since. The same kind of "atmosphere" had not arisen again between the two of them, but somehow, he could not forget it just like that...

Hal suddenly thought of Orihime.

Undoubtedly, Orihime was a special member of the opposite sex from Haruga Haruomi's perspective. While reporting on work progress to his inseparable childhood friend, he would subconsciously think of Orihime. Just now when spending time with Luna too, and currently while talking to Asya—

Doing this sort of thing made him want to see Orihime badly.

At that moment, Asya launched a surprise attack as though she had read his mind.

"This is a goodnight kiss. See you tomorrow."

It happened just as he reached Narihirabashi, got off the train, and was walking along the street at night, chatting about all kinds of things.

Asya suddenly kissed Hal on the cheek.

Furthermore, she departed swiftly without looking back, leaving Hal rooted to the spot, so shaken that he could not utter a single word.



While Hal was staring blankly at his childhood friend walking away, the following thought occurred to him again.

I really want to see her face—Orihime's.

There should be a few pictures on his cellphone, taken by chance. Hal took out his phone, thinking of looking at Orihime's face, and discovered something.

There was a text from Shirasaka Hazumi.

'If you have time, Senpai, would you mind paying a visit to Nee-sama's house? Together with her, I will be waiting for you there.'

Not only Orihime but even her cousin Hazumi were there.

Hal rushed back home and took out the scooter parked in the yard. He had started riding it recently to travel more efficiently around the city.

Part 4

Juujouji Orihime's home was situated at Monzen-Nakachō Station.

It was an ancient and magnificent samurai house and surrounded by a perimeter wall with glazed roof tiles.

Hal parked the scooter near the main entrance and took off his helmet. Then he heard the adorable junior student's voice. She happened to be walking from the opposite direction.

"Senpai!"

"Did you go out for some shopping?"

"Yes. The weather is still quite hot, so I bought some ice cream. I bought your share too, Senpai."

Carrying a small plastic bag, Hazumi was in her school uniform.

Displaying a smile of 100% purity towards him, Hazumi was even more like an angel than a real angel. Hal would not be surprised to see a holy glow behind her.

However, Hazumi suddenly looked serious.

Judging from her expression, Hal was confused to see that she had resolved herself in some way. At that moment, the adorable junior student took a few steps to approach him and did something unexpected.

"I-It's very hot outside! Let's hurry indoors!"

Hazumi hugged Hal's right arm.

And she hugged very tightly. The fourteen-year-old girl's delicate body was pressed firmly against his arm. Hal could feel the warmth and softness of Hazumi's body through her uniform.

During early September, the summer heat still had not left Tokyo New Town.

Pressing this tightly would feel even hotter—Even though Hal thought that, the sudden surprise and the sensation of Hazumi's body had made him lose composure, making him unable to say anything except "O-Okay."

"Nee-sama is waiting for you too. Come, please enter."

"N-No need to pull me. I can walk by myself!"

"I don't want you to get lost!"

Hazumi took Hal's hand considerately and led him to the entrance.

Although the courtyard was comparable to a small Japanese garden in size, Hal had visited several times previously. There was essentially just one path, so there should not be any risk of getting lost no matter how you looked at it.

Still, he could not bring himself to reject Hazumi's hand and her benevolent wishes.

In the end, Hal obediently allowed Hazumi to lead him by the hand into the entrance. There, greeting him was another girl.

"Haruga-kun, welcome. Sorry for being busy in the afternoon and not going over to Luna-san's place. I suddenly had to take care of something."

"Don't worry about it. It didn't cause any problems anyway."

She had probably come to greet Hal and Hazumi after looking out the window and seeing them walking in the courtyard.

After answering Juujouji Orihime who had been waiting at the entrance, Hal suddenly felt alarmed. He was still holding hands with Hazumi.

He and Orihime had "that kind of relationship" going on, sort of.

Even though Hazumi was a second-year middle schooler, his junior and Orihime's cousin to boot, wouldn't it be bad to let her see him so close to another girl...?

Hal did not know if Orihime was feigning ignorance or actually unaware of Hal's worries, but she said cheerfully, "Have you had dinner yet? I cooked your share too, so if you don't mind, please join us."

"D-Don't worry. The only thing I've eaten today was that salt candy I had at noon."

"Good grief. You haven't changed the slightest, not eating your meals properly."

"I was too engrossed in my phone, so I forgot."

"In any case, you were reading work-related documents, weren't you? Don't push yourself too far, or you'll die of overexhaustion even before you start fighting dragons."

Hal smiled wryly as he listened to Orihime nagging at him with his best interests in mind.

"Say, what about your grandfather? I need to greet him."

"He isn't here. He will be back quite late tonight, which is why I wanted to have Hazumi—and you—over for dinner. Although my cooking is not as good as Asya-san's, please note that I made every dish myself."

"Senpai, I helped out too!" Hazumi smiled and added after listening to Orihime.

As a side note, Hal and Hazumi's hands were still together.

...After that, Hazumi only released his hand when she went towards what would presumably the kitchen, saying she had to put the ice cream away.

Hal's heart was still beating hard when Orihime led him to a spacious Japanese-style room.

Orihime's home was a Japanese mansion so there were no western living room or dining hall. A large table was on the tatami floor, covered with all kinds of dishes.

There was salad with bean curd and mashed yams, pickled eggplant, ratatouille made from a suitable selection of summer vegetables, a large

amount of fried chicken, bitter melon stir fried with bean curd, etc. The dishes lacked a unifying theme, which contributed to a home-cooking flavor.

After a while, the trio began their meal.

Probably due to the excessively hot weather lately, Hal lacked appetite. But compared to the last few days, he ate quite a lot during dinner tonight.

Perhaps it was due to chatting with Orihime and Hazumi while eating.

Compared to eating rapidly within five minutes, spending one or two hours to slowly enjoy a full meal was better for digestion and allowed greater quantities to be eaten.

After the meal, they even ate the ice cream that Hazumi had just bought earlier.

Hal frequently ate alone, finishing his food in two or three seconds without talking to anyone. For Hal, eating like he did on this occasion was quite incredible.

Forget about eating out at shops, even at home, he could not possibly chat while eating.

Hal was aware that this was not his home but the Juujouji residence, yet he was still able to relax himself as though he were in his own territory.

This was evidence of how close he had become with Hazumi and Orihime.

The three of them spent their time peacefully. Hazumi left first to head for home before it was too dark, leaving Hal and Orihime alone in the house.

The dining table was already cleared. Also, night had only just begun.

However, Hal suggested he should leave for home earlier.

"It's time for me to go."

To be honest, he really wanted to enjoy this "alone time between the two of them."

However, Juujouji Orihime's grandfather was quite a hassle. He would mercilessly (or rather, childishly) repel all males who approached his granddaughter. Furthermore, Hal had done "that" previously, so meeting him would be very awkward...

"Oh my? Grandfather called."

Orihime's phone rang.

Her family conversation lasted merely three minutes.

"Early this morning, Grandfather went to Chiba to visit an old friend he had not seen for many years... He is not coming home tonight, apparently."

"Was there some kind of accident?"

"No, Grandfather said that he started drinking a lot before sundown because he hadn't seen his friend for so long. He sounded like he was in a good mood and said he was going to drink with his friend all the way until dawn."

"...Glad to hear that. It sounds like he's in good health."

"That's because Grandfather trains in martial arts. He nags a lot but has no ability to refuse alcohol at all. Every time he goes out drinking, he basically starts during the daytime."

"From what I've heard, athletic people drink like fish when they gather together."

"At gatherings organized by Grandfather and his friends, it's taken for granted that they will continue into the after-party and the after-after-party."

Orihime's grandfather gave off an intensely serious and stubborn image.

Recalling that extremely solemn face, Hal smiled wryly. Meanwhile, the conscientious and reliable granddaughter suddenly became restless and murmured, "So, Haruga-kun... Are you about to leave?"

"Uh, yeah."

The only obstacle standing in the way of unexpectedly good fortune had been eliminated.

Hal and Orihime made eye contact. In the next instant, they sprang into action like water from a ruptured dam. Walking towards each other, they embraced and kissed passionately.

Savoring each other's lips in the Juujouji living room, they remained lost in each other for a very long time.

Finally releasing their lips, Orihime murmured in rapture.

"I've always wanted to do this with you..."

"Me too, Juujouji..."

Of course, they did not resent Hazumi for being a third wheel.

Both of them loved the adorable junior and younger cousin, welcoming her presence any time.

However, this was a totally separate matter.

As a couple whose hearts and minds finally came together during midsummer in New York, wouldn't it be human nature to desire reaffirming "this kind of relationship" whenever an opportunity presented itself?

That was what Hal thought, and luckily, it was probably the same for Orihime.

Finally, they moved to the sofa, embracing each other tightly like two threads woven into a yarn. Rubbing their cheeks together playfully, they kept kissing each other nonstop.

"Sorry, I haven't had time to spend alone with you..."

"Don't worry, that's because you are very busy. And previously, we also decided not to tell everyone else about our relationship."

Generously accepting everything Orihime spoke softly then suddenly began to sulk.

"However, you were having a meeting alone with Luna-san, weren't you...?"

"I'm sorry to say this, but that's because you two canceled on me!"

"I-I know, but it couldn't be helped. B-But given Luna-san's proclivities, I am certain she must have shown her affections to you passionately... Right?"

"Uh, well—"

"I know everything. Just now, you were holding hands with Hazumi too."

"U-Uh, sorry."

"Oh... I'm not scolding you. I understand too that we don't want to mess up the team atmosphere. Because everyone ____ you."

"? Juujouji, what did you say?"

"N-Nothing. Anyway... What did you do with Luna-san?"

"Oh!? By what did I do, you mean?"

"Like the way we kissed just now, or hugging her tightly, that sort of thing."

"Of course not. We totally didn't do anything that crossed the line so much..."

"Really?"

"...If anything, there was the lap pillow."

"I knew it."

Hal did not dare to reveal the ear cleaning part, so he simply gave a half truth.

Orihime was a little angry and turned her back to him. She got angry after all?—Just as Hal was surprised by the reaction from the girl he loved...

She leaned her back gently against him.

"Juujouji!?"

"I could let you lie on my lap too, but you already did that back in Izu, so even if I did that, it only makes me even with Luna-san—So, Haruga-kun, you will be my cushion. If you agree to this, all will be forgiven."

"Let alone a cushion, I'm fine with being your human chair!"

Sitting together with Orihime on the sofa, Hal made a slightly confused declaration.

Currently, he was using his whole body to support Orihime's back, feeling the weight and warmth of her body. Sitting on Hal's lap, she was definitely not light.

However, what Hal experienced was an overwhelming sense of fulfillment and bliss.

Perhaps it was due to the fact that he was pressed tightly together with the unguarded Juujouji Orihime, feeling her warmth with his entire body.

(Speaking of which, this posture...)

It suddenly occurred to Hal that this posture was identical to when using techniques of assured annihilation.

Every time so far, he had reaching around to Orihime's chest from behind, to inject magical power into her heart.

"Ah!? H-Haruga-kun, your hand—!"

"Eh? Oh, sorry!"

Hal's right hand had subconsciously grabbed Orihime's bust.

He was completely unaware of it. It looked like his hand had moved automatically just as he thought "it's a bit similar to those times."



Orihime's breast was quite massive and about to overflow from his palm. The sensation of his five fingers sinking into her soft flesh was a little erotic. Simply touching Orihime's bust was already filling Hal's heart with an exhilarating sense of pleasure.

"Geez... Haruga-kun, you are so perverted."

"Sorry, my hand moved before I noticed."

Hal intentionally spoke in a serious tone of voice.

"I've never told you, Juujouji, but in truth, I really love your breasts. Of course, I really really love you as a person too. I promise you, even if you your breasts weren't so large, my feelings for you still wouldn't change the slightest."

"No matter how serious you make your tone of voice, it still doesn't change the fact that you are a pervert..."

"I-I'm terribly sorry."

"...So, would you like to continue?"

"Ehhh!?"

"Since you already said, Haruga-kun, you love me so much, allowing you to touch more... isn't entirely out of the question. Because I love you too."

"Juujouji!"

"Mmm, Haruga-kun!"

Hearing that from the girl he loved, Hal instantly felt his mind blank out.

By the time he realized, his hands and fingers were already grabbing Orihime's breasts forcefully. He hastily controlled his grip while gently

squeezing the breasts that could not be held in one hand, trying to contain them in his palms.

Intimately pressed to Orihime, he placed his palms on top of her breasts—

At this very moment, Hal experienced the happiest moment of his life.

"Th-This seems to feel so calming."

"M-Me too, it seems. By doing this, my entire body feels like I am together with you. I feel—so very happy."

"Juujouji..."

"Haruga-kun..."

Just as Hal felt deeply that his body and mind were gradually relaxing, in the next instant—

He was struck by a sudden wave of drowsiness.

"Haruga-kun, did you fall asleep?"

Turned into a human cushion, Haruga Haruomi was supporting Orihime's body.

Becoming Orihime's most beloved existence over the past few months, this young man had started breathing slowly steadily at some point in time. He had fallen asleep. One could hardly blame him.

Although his hectic life had eased somewhat, he was still busy devising "the plan" and did not even have enough time to sleep.

Incidentally, after losing consciousness, Hal still did not let go of Orihime's bust.

While exasperated, Orihime could not help but feel impressed by the tenacity displayed by the self-proclaimed "closet pervert." After that, she also experienced a deep sense of happiness surging in her heart.

"Jeez... Seeing him so happy would make me feel an urge to indulge him and allow him to do even more. Luna-san had clearly reminded us earlier..."

Juujouji Orihime, Luna Francois, and Shirasaka Hazumi.

The three girls were jointly involved in a "secret mission."

The whole thing started since their return from New York, after her cousin Hazumi reported to them, 'At this rate, Senpai will lose his human memories and turn into a dragon!'

This was the trigger that prompted the trio to start comparing notes on Haruga Haruomi.

As a result, many things were laid out on the table. His transformation into a dragon was progressing without impediment, and his memories as a human were going to vanish while his powers increased—

Now, it was finally approaching a point of no return.

However, if he could experience intense pleasure as a human (such as satisfying his lust as a "closet pervert"), his memories and human qualities would show signs of recovery...

After learning of this fact, Luna Francois had been the first to speak.

'...I have decided. I shall do many things to make my dear perverted Harry happy, thereby delaying his transformation into a dragon for as long as possible.'

'M-Me too!'

Surprisingly, even the obedient and gentle Hazumi declared immediately too.

Orihime was the only one left speechless, but Luna Francois made a suggestive look and said, 'I presume you will be doing the same, Orihime-san, hence all of us ought to join forces.'

Thus, the progressive American girl began to make suggestions.

'What worries me most is... whether we should allow "the final line" to be crossed easily or not. Personally, I would love to do it and I'm pretty certain Harry would gladly go along. However, humans tend to get used to and grow tired of happiness that is offered to them automatically. As such, we must set our boundaries in advance regarding how we please Harry.'

The two Japanese girls were dumbfounded by her upfront candor.

In the end, using Luna's suggestions as a foundation, the two girls joined in to form a united Japanese-American front.

They did more than secretly share information. For example, today, Orihime and Hazumi were "coincidentally" occupied and unable to join the meeting, allowing Haruomi to spend time alone with Luna Francois, facilitating her advances—

This was also part of their cooperation.

Furthermore, Asya was not a member in this. This too, was Luna's opinion.

'Let's leave her out. I worry that her feminine charm isn't enough, so Harry would only see her as family—like a sister—and dismiss her as that kind of prospect from the start. The key point is that I feel the situation would get very troublesome if Asya were to join in.'

Thus, the current situation emerged.

Juujouji Orihime and Haruga Haruomi were still in "that kind of relationship," sort of. This she had neither told Hazumi nor Luna. Joining the united front without revealing this placed her in a very complicated position.

With Haruga Haruomi grabbing her breasts, she murmured to herself, trying to sound the least furious possible.

"I do all this for Haruga-kun—for you. Were it not for the sake of the world, I would never allow you to do this."

This was something she originally found intolerable, but the thought of doing it for his sake made Orihime feel that she could now accept it. How unbelievable.

Juujouji Orihime was surprised by this.

At that very moment, the cellphone on the living room table blared with an ear-splitting siren.

"!?"

Orihime hastily brushed away young Haruomi's hands and picked up the phone to check the message.

This cellphone was set up so that it would only sound this siren when receiving news about fighting dragons—a witch's mission. She swept the cellphone's touchscreen then immediately roused Haruga Haruomi from his slumber.

"Haruga-kun, this is bad! Dragons have appeared in Tokyo Bay!"

Inside Tokyo Bay, Raptors were heading towards the vicinity of Urayasu City. They numbered roughly a hundred—

Unbeknownst to Orihime and Haruomi at the time, this incident was caused by a nostalgic old foe, and that Haruga Haruomi and his companions were about to face their greatest crisis yet...

Chapter 2 - A Gathering of Old Foes

Part 1

Urayasu City in Chiba Prefecture was on the coast of Tokyo Bay.

Located there was what used to be the nation's biggest theme park.

However, when the Old Tokyo Concession was established roughly twenty years ago, the former capital was turned into an uninhabited wasteland. The population in Tokyo and its surrounding areas was dramatically reduced.

Tourist numbers went down as a result and the theme park was moved to the Kanagawa area...

"If possible, I'd rather this be a usual raid."

A high-speed helicopter was flying over the former site of the giant theme park.

Riding a helicopter on a beeline to Tokyo Bay, Hal spoke quietly.

The visit to the Juujouji residence was already last night. The next morning at 5am, he had boarded the helicopter.

"Instead of attacking New Town, the invading Raptors yesterday gathered at a mysterious island that had *suddenly appeared* in Tokyo Bay... An elite or even higher ranked dragon must be behind this, no matter how you look at it."

"Senpai, so it must be a dragon king after all?"

"Either a dragon king or someone—or rather, a dragon—in the same position as me. That's the most likely case."

Hal replied to the only witch present in the helicopter cabin, Hazumi.

...At roughly 8pm last night, Raptors had flown down from satellite orbits. At the same time, a cataclysmic event happened in Tokyo Bay.

A sudden shift in the Earth's crust—

The seabed suddenly bulged up, producing an *island* within the span of merely one night.

Then a hundred Raptors gathered, circling over the island and its vicinity. The witches of New Town had exterminated them last night.

Nothing worthy of note had happened during the elimination process. The mission was accomplished without issue.

After exploring the island using investigative magic and drones equipped with night vision cameras, they finally made their way to the scene this morning.

"So that's the island huh..."

Coming into a view was an island floating all alone in Tokyo Bay.

It was roughly the area of a fort built on reclaimed land.

This piece of land was quite breathtaking. The center of the island rose up high, looking like an underwater volcano that had become active and surfaced from the ocean due to volcanic activity.

Hal sighed.

"Were these waters located near the Ogasawara Islands or the Izu Islands, it'd still be possible to explain this as volcanic activity along the Pacific Ring of Fire, causing an underwater volcano to surface."

"It took us less than thirty minutes to fly here from Tokyo..."

"Because this place is pretty close to Tokyo, after all."

This was not a part of the sea with tectonic activity. This part of Tokyo Bay was visible from the shore of Urayasu City—the former site of a large theme park.

Hal and Hazumi were sitting in the back seats with the cockpit in front of them.

The pilot and the co-pilot were seated in the cockpit, in charge of operating this JMSDF high-speed helicopter. They were currently on a mission.

"Excuse me. Please let us off here, just as the plan dictated," said Hal to the pilot and the co-pilot.

They were about to get on the island to start investigating.

However, it would be too risky to deploy their entire team at a clearly unsafe place.

Hence, the trio of Asya, Orihime, and Luna Francois were on standby at the theme park's former site. Hal took only Hazumi with him.

Her partner, Minadzuki, was also flying in front of the helicopter.

The emerald serpentine dragon was moving her gigantic body gracefully, swimming through the sky over the sea.

Normally, the job of entering a dangerous area as the vanguard should be left to the strongest witches such as Asya or Luna, but Hal had chosen Hazumi on purpose.

After a while, the helicopter landed on the rocky and uneven shore.

Hal and Hazumi were the only ones to disembark. The pilot and the co-pilot waited inside the helicopter. They were to fly away immediately if any emergency situation came up.

"Senpai. Minadzuki... is wary. She says there is a unpleasant smell—and it's a smell she has encountered before!"

"Figures, so it is someone from before, huh?"

For the time being, the two of them were making their way to the center of the island.

The center rose up like the peak of a mountain. One could even call the entire island a mountain.

However, it was a lifeless mountain of rock. Since it had been under the sea until half a day earlier, the lack of life was only normal. However, there was not even a single weed growing out of the ground.

Only rocks no matter where they went, it was a land devoid of vegetation.

Furthermore, the ground underfoot was moist from seawater, giving a sticky feeling when walking over it.

Fortunately, they had brought slip-resistant hiking boots. The two of them advanced to the center while taking care not to slip or fall. Suddenly, Hazumi cried out.

"Senpai, that's—!"

"I sort of guessed it, but I'd really prefer if I didn't have to meet him."

The giant body of a dragon suddenly appeared at the peak in the center of the island.

He had probably used teleportation magic. The dragon was ten-odd meters in body length, his silver scales glittering brilliantly under the sunlight.

Pavel Galad, the Tyrannos who had inherited the Rune of the Sword.

The peak where Pavel Galad had appeared was a few kilometers away from Hal and Hazumi's position.

Spreading his silver wings in leisure, he flew slowly towards them.

"It has been a while, Haruga Haruomi, successor to the dragonslaying Rune of the Bow."

Despite the distance between them, the silver dragon's youthful and beautiful voice reached Hal and Hazumi's ears with great clarity.

A type of sound transmission magic must have been used. Pavel Galad's voice was as clear as if he were speaking while standing in front of them. Hal responded normally since Pavel could hear him regardless.

"So it seems like you've been skulking around Tokyo lately?"

"Have I been discovered? You are truly a man not to be underestimated."

Despite having more than a kilometer between them, they could converse normally.

"So the reason why you've entered the stage openly... It's for *that*, right? This time, you're going to have a showdown against Princess Yukikaze for real?"

"Oh? How rare to see you asking such a question."

"What do you mean?"

"Given your intelligence, I would expect you to know without needing me to explain."

"....."

"Needless to say, I returned only to cross blades with Princess Yukikaze. Nevertheless, Haruga Haruomi, you are an important rival too. I regard you as one that I must defeat..."

"I wish you could be more friendly to me, if possible."

Pavel Galad's gigantic body was flying straight towards them.

Slowly and carefully, he lowered his altitude. A double-edged longsword suddenly appeared in his right hand. It was a rugged silver sword.

Hal had seen this sword before. It was the manifestation of the Rune of the Sword...!

"Hohohoho, I hereby swear that I shall defeat you this time. No matter what obstacles I must surmount, I will be victorious against you!"

"Damn it! I don't want to see that sword ever again!"

An additional layer of pearly light surrounded the silver dragon that was wielding the dragonslaying sword.

Imperishable protection. This was the defensive barrier that Hal and others regarded as a valuable treasure too. Fully armed, Pavel Galad approached by air—And that was not all.

"I offer prayer to the seal in my possession, that of the Divine Sword of the Heavens. Let the thunder god's sword manifest here and now!"

"Uh, a finishing move right off the bat!?"

Nineteen magical symbols appeared along the blade of the dragonslaying sword.

All runes of Ruruk Soun. Hal had some recollection of this arrangement, which signified "I summon the thunder god's sword to unsheathe in haste"—

In the next instant, the dragonslaying longsword flashed with electrical radiance—

Together with the dragon wielding it, the sword descended upon Hal and Hazumi swiftly from above!

"Let my mystic sword serve as the signal to herald a new war. Here I come, Haruga Haruomi!"

"You're hot-blooded as always, never stingy with the big moves!"

Hal grumbled, looked at the witch beside him and requested, "I'm counting on you, Shirasaka!"

"Yes! Minadzuki—Protect us!"

Hazumi's order was quite vague, but for her partner, this was enough.

This leviathan was not only intelligent, but among Hal's comrades, the power she had mastered was also the most special and rare.

The serpentine dragon leviathan, Minadzuki, had been waiting ready behind them the whole time.

She charged head on towards Pavel Galad who was flying at them. Held in Minadzuki's right forelimb was a white jewel.

Inside that glowing orb, a magical symbol similar to a half moon appeared.

It was Hal's seal, the Rune of the Bow. After a long absence, the sword was finally reunited with the bow. These two powers of dragonbane—did not clash.

"Thanks, Minadzuki!"

Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

The prayer of Hazumi and the howl of Minadzuki, a sacred beast rather than a demonic beast, resounded in all directions.

Fourteen runes of Ruruk Soun appeared behind the serpentine dragon leviathan's back. This arrangement signified "armistice," abandoning the use of force.

The runic arrangement for the lowering of weapons—enacted a miracle!

"Oh!?"

Pavel Galad was very shocked.

This was because the dragonslaying sword, enveloped in lightning of maximum power, had vanished from his hand.

The jewel held in Minadzuki's forelimb also disappeared at the same time. This was a mystic rite for sealing away the weapons and dragonslaying powers of both sides.

Only Hazumi and Minadzuki, a "serpent" that had awakened this kind of goddess power, were capable of using such a spell.

Seizing this opportunity to attack was Hal's job—

"Queen! Use a technique of assured annihilation!"

The giant dragon, standing twenty meters tall, instantly appeared.

It was Hinokagutsuchi's form in the past—The Crimson Queen. Enormous and dignified, it even made Pavel Galad look inferior in contrast.

The giant dragon, akin to Hal's avatar, was holding a bow in its right forelimb.

A crimson longbow. The dragonslaying bow. The queen nocked the arrow—an arrow of light and flame—drew the bow and shot it.

"Ohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

Attacked by the arrow and the scorching blaze, Pavel Galad howled loudly.

Currently, twenty-one runes of Ruruk Soun had appeared overhead of the archer, the queen.

The arrangement signified "I will fire the sun-shooting divine bow at the sky, to exterminate the sun."

This was Hal's most powerful trump card. The result of mastering even King Solomon's legacy, the Rune of the Ring, meant that he was finally capable of firing the sun-shooting divine bow on his own.

—Sealing away both the enemy's and one's own power of dragonbane, then unleashing the most powerful attack.

Hal had chosen to bring Hazumi with him in order to execute this surprise attack.

Just as planned, the crimson arrow struck Pavel Galad directly. Wailing while scorched by intense flames capable of even burning dragons to ash—

"H-Hohohohohoho."

"Senpai!?"

"No way..."

Seeing the silver dragon laughing to himself despite being immolated, Hal muttered to himself.

Next to him, Hazumi was speechless. She knew better than anyone that the holy mystic technique of a goddess had definitely sealed away Galad and Minadzuki's powers of dragonbane.

However, the dragonslaying sword reappeared in the silver dragon's hand.

In addition, the sword was pointed straight at them. Using the tip of the sword, he blocked the arrow—the divine bow's arrow.

The arrow, capable of shooting down the sun, shattered that very instant.

Pavel Galad extended his longsword and seventeen runes of Ruruk Soun manifested on the body of the blade.

The arrangement signified "O blue sky, I beseech you to grant the sword god's favored affection unto my blade."

Hal widened his eyes. Blue-white flames surrounded the entire dragonslaying sword.

The flames were imbued with extremely powerful magic. Presumably because of the flames' effects, the dragonslaying sword's potency and magical power had greatly increased.

In the next instant, the ground underfoot shook violently, accompanied by a thunderous "BOOM!"

The Tyrannos who had defended against the surprise attack and technique of assured annihilation—Pavel Galad—landed on the ground.

"I thought we'd made that sword go away..."

"Do not underestimate me. For the sake of fighting you again, I too have made many preparations."

"Here you go again, doing things that dragons don't normally do..."

"What are you talking about? I learned all this from you. Precisely when you cannot match a formidable opponent in strength do you have to rack your brain and struggle with every power at your disposal. Hohohoho."

Having effortlessly countered Hal and Hazumi's surprise attack, Galad laughed with satisfaction.

If one were to use an RPG analogy, Pavel Galad would undoubtedly be a "hero"-class dragon and larger-than-life character. Hot-blooded and possessing excessive righteous fighting spirit.

However, in the case of the Road to Kingship where the dragon king's throne was the goal—

Confronting enemies head on, fair and square, could lead to death.

Now, Galad had finally grown accustomed to this excessively challenging and unfair game.

"You don't have to use me as a strategy guide..."

Every dog has its day.

Hal recalled this idiom—How uncharacteristic of his style.

During the battle against Princess Yukikaze before the summer break, Hal and allied temporarily with Pavel Galad. Perhaps what he had seen and experienced back then had changed him.

No matter what, this crisis must be resolved. Hal switched mindsets.

"...Huh?"

There was a strange feeling in his chest.

His heart—or rather, his heartmetal—was scorching. His entire body also heated up. Furthermore, something was also happening to the Crimson Queen.

The red body of the former dragon queen was entirely covered in *flames*.

The intense blaze instantly expanded.

Using the sun-shooting divine bow had pulled some kind of trigger, as though turning heightened fighting spirit and magical power into burning flames—

Crap. At this rate, the Crimson Queen was going to *awaken* for real!

Hal was utterly terrified.

"S-Senpai? Are you okay...?"

Probably noticing the color was off in Hal's face, Hazumi inquired in concern.

As expected of the angel on earth, she was considerate and attentive. However, Haruga Haruomi was currently too preoccupied to answer. All he did was touch his chest—the area near his heart—in surprise.

The next instant...

"Fufufufufu. I, Yukikaze, smelled a fight and came to look. Surprisingly, it was you two."

An adorable and gallant voice descended from the sky.

Hal looked up. Just as expected, a girl dressed in a white one-piece dress entered his view. She was standing confidently on top of her "flying surfboard" of a magic wand, looking down with amusement at the silver dragon and Haruga Haruomi who were facing off on the ground.

"Hello again, both of you. I see that the two of you have taken great pains to prepare a venue worthy of receiving my presence. This place is not half bad!"

A nostalgic voice entered Hal's ears.

During the summer break, he had met Princess Yukikaze at Izu.

Watching with delight at the desperate struggles of the two lower-ranked Tyrannoi—This was the confidence and composure of the current queen.

The elusive dragon king, Princess Yukikaze, had arrived.

Part 2

"We didn't work together to make this special arena," said Hal to Princess Yukikaze, putting aside his strange feeling and crisis awareness for now.

Now that even Princess Yukikaze had shown up, who had time to deal with that kind of stuff?



"That guy over there seems to be responsible, though I don't know the details either."

"Yes. I devoted a fair amount of effort for the sake of eliminating my fated rival and the white dragon king at the same time. A mighty fine job, if I should say so myself..." Wielding the dragonslaying sword, Pavel Galad declared proudly.

Present here was the Crimson Queen, armed with the dragonslaying bow, and Pavel Galad with his prided massive body of metallic silver. In appearance alone, both of them looked stronger than Princess Yukikaze.

However, the young girl who was stronger than everyone here smiled in leisure.

"Well said, silver dragon! In that case, I, Yukikaze, hereby command you."

Perhaps because she was standing on a flying surfboard, roughly thirty meters off the ground...

Princess Yukikaze was "in a higher position" both physically and mentally, looking downwards at Hal and Galad, issuing a royal decree.

"Defeat Haruomi first then call for me. You must redeem yourself for your past defeat and prove that you have the ability to challenge a king."

"That was my intention all along. O Princess, thank you for accepting my challenge."

"Do not thank me so hastily. It appears that you have learned plenty, but petty tricks of that sort belong more in Haruomi's domain. Whether the dragonslaying sword can reach the same heights as I, Yukikaze... I certainly look forward to finding out."

"Uh, excuse me—"

Galad looked all fired up with hot blood while Princess Yukikaze brought up Haruga Haruomi's name as though showing off her own toy.

Hal still had self-awareness as a mortal, more or less. He cautiously suggested, "I'd rather join forces with one of you to take out the other opponent first..."

As "members of a warrior race," elite dragons could not possibly agree to such a request.

Hal was merely saying it as a test. Princess Yukikaze scoffed while Pavel Galad showed no reaction, completely ignoring it.

Oh dear. Hal shook his head and changed the subject.

"Then at least postpone the battle until tomorrow. You suddenly asked me to fight, but I'm not mentally prepared yet."

"Oh?"

Pavel Galad's reaction was quite mysterious.

He first stared at Hal then shifted his gaze to the Crimson Queen. After some thought, he muttered "I see now" to himself.

Hal shuddered.

He felt a wave of unease as though he had been stripped naked completely.

"I do not mind. If you have such a need, would you like to change the duel's venue too?"

"....."

How surprising. This small island that had suddenly appeared on the surface of the ocean must have been land created by Galade through magic. In other words, this was completely enemy territory.

It was anyone's guess where the traps were located on this island.

Hal originally thought Galad would naturally want to fight here.

Apparently seeing through Hal's thoughts, the silver dragon said nonchalantly, "We are capable of soaring the skies. After the battle commences, we could fly to wherever we want."

"Well, that's true."

"Then let us set the duel to begin tomorrow morning. Anywhere in Tokyo is fine with me. Just call my name at your preferred location and that would be where the battle begins. Will that do for you?"

"...Nah, this place is fine."

It looked like Pavel Galad intended to treat Tokyo New Town as a battlefield without any restrictions.

Realizing this, Hal rejected the suggestion. Though this small island was suspicious, the fact that it was uninhabited was pretty convenient.

Also, since the day of the duel could be postponed to tomorrow, there was time to come up with countermeasures...

"In exchange, I want to investigate this island and see if you've cast weird spells or set traps. If I find anything, I'll decide whether I eliminate them or postpone the battle further."

"Very well. Investigate as much as you like."

Still the same as always, Galad answered with full seriousness.

Spreading his pair of silver wings, he flew south.

Investigate as much as you like—True to his word, it looked like Galad did not intend to get in Hal's way. For an opponent demanding a personal duel, he was quite fair and upstanding.

As for the other dragon—

"Fufufufu. The day of our duel is drawing near... The assumption is that you must defeat that silver dragon."

By the time Hal noticed, Princess Yukikaze had lowered the altitude of her surfboard.

From five or six meters above Hal, she gazed down upon him.

"Do your best, Haruomi. We are the ones who hold the bow and the arrow forming a pair. Muster your full power, bearing in mind that I, Yukikaze, desires fervently to fight you."

Leaving these parting words, Princess Yukikaze flew away too.

She went west—making a beeline for the Old Tokyo Concession.

Even a randomly tossed comment had such a poetic quality to it. This princess was full of personality as always. Feeling nostalgic while finding her too dazzling to behold, he muttered, "Everyone just talks without listening."

Staring off into the sky where his foes had disappeared, he recalled Funakisan's report.

Eyewitnesses had spotted Pavel Galad's human form at a number of locations. In addition, the use of investigative magic across New Town resulted in the detection of strange signals recently—

Was this island actually a red herring while the true trap was hidden in Tokyo New Town?

If that was the case, then sure enough, fighting inside Tokyo would be very risky. Declining Galad's suggestion had probably been the right decision.

"Dragons are clearly battle maniacs, yet they still cause me such headaches..."

Unable to put his mind at ease, Hal thought to himself.

In many ways, the silver dragon Pavel Galad had changed from before. Hal had to wage a great decisive battle tomorrow against such a monster—What a burdensome feeling.

Three hours later, Hal left the island after conducting various investigations.

In addition to investigative magic—SAURU's magic—Hal even made use of Ruruk Soun's magic to investigate carefully. The leviathan Minadzuki also used her sense of smell and a sacred beast's super sensitivity to help search for anything unusual or dangerous.

Other than the surface, deep underground was also included as part of the search.

However, nothing suspicious was found anywhere. It was merely "a small island raised up from the seabed by the magic of dragonkind."

"Anyway, I asked Luna to go over there and take over the investigation in our place."

To return to Tokyo New Town, they had asked the JMSDF to send a small transport ship.

Inside the seventy-meter-long ship, Hal was speaking with Hazumi in a cabin.

"That being said, I'm guessing the investigation won't come up with anything."

"What about Nee-sama and Asya-san?"

"I asked them to investigate New Town because I heard that Galad has been wandering all over the place for the past few months. However—"

Hal sighed.

"To be honest, I don't think any clues will turn up. If anything could be found, I'm sure one of us would've discovered it long ago. After all, Tokyo is our territory."

"Yes. Minadzuki hasn't warned me this summer."

"I'm putting the odds at fifty-fifty. If he really didn't play any tricks..."

"Or perhaps Galad-san was very cautious and even came up with measures to counter magical investigation when he was setting up his trap..."

"Yes, that's right. You really know a lot, Shirasaka."

"That's because you taught me a lot, Senpai."

Hazumi was smiling demurely at Hal from up close.

This was a cramped cabin inside a transport ship. Hal was sitting on the bed as so was the excessively pure junior student.

Not only was she sitting on the same bed as Hal, but she was leaning very close to him.

Why was she sitting here when there was clearly more space? To be honest, Hal was completely baffled. However, leaning against him, offering support, Hazumi's touch and warmth made him feel very comfortable in mind and body.

Letting this continue might not be half bad—Just as this notion surfaced in his mind, Hal shook his head.

"Oh—Shirasaka, shouldn't we give each other a bit more space?"

"But Senpai, you looked so unwell just now."

"Just now?"

"Yes. When the dragon king—Princess Yukikaze—showed up, you looked like you were beleaguered by coldness, like you had a high fever, the look on your face was very scary..."

"Oh."

Hal could now understand why Hazumi was leaning against him. However, he found it odd.

Even so, this distance was too close. What was Hazumi thinking? Even if it were out of worry... This was virtually... As his thoughts reached this point, Hal jumped in surprise.

Because Hazumi reached out gently with her left hand and touched his right hand.

The junior student's sudden action made his heart skip a beat. Hal did not know if his adorable protege was aware of his feelings, but she said worriedly, "Also, Senpai, your body is so cold and hard."

"R-Really?"

"Yes. It feels like metal, you know?"

"..."

Metal. Hal recalled the giant lifeform he had been fighting several hours earlier—the silver dragon—and could not help but think.

Perhaps he too might turn into something like that...

Try as he might to not think about this, such a possibility was impossible to rule out no matter what.

Just as he was about to be imprisoned in this pessimistic mindset—

"Senpai, your body is really cold. E-Excuse me!"

Sitting next to him, Hazumi suddenly took off her shoes and moved over the bed.

Kneeling on the bed, she hugged Hal's head. As a result, Haruga Haruomi's face was buried into her bosom—

"Sh-Shiraska!?"

"Can.. we stay in this posture for a while? I'd like to do something."

Hazumi's voice sounded full of determination.

Her usual self, polite and reserved self, was nowhere to be found. Next, the junior student began to stroke Hal's head gently. Round and round, it seemed like her motions intended to massage and soften the hard surface.

During this time, Hal's face remained buried in Hazumi's chest.

For a fourteen-year-old, Hazumi was "very well developed" and fairly busty. Hal never thought he would ever get a chance in his life to confirm the sensation of her chest in this manner—

"Oh, Senpai, you're relaxing a little now."

"I-I see. That's good to know."

Damn it. Form is no different from emptiness, and emptiness is no different from form... Exercising self-control to prevent his mind from having inappropriate thoughts, Hal mentally thanked Hazumi for her care and concern from the bottom of his heart.

The kind-hearted junior student was probably doing this out of worry for Hal's health.

Of course, Hal felt very embarrassed that he was being held and comforted in this posture like a baby. However, Hazumi's kindness and her voluptuous—were soothing his heart even more. Both his mind and body were relaxing...

Feeling an indescribable sense of comfort, Hal's consciousness gradually faded.

"Oh right..."

On further thought, he had made the Crimson Queen use the sun-shooting divine bow by his own power alone.



This was his first time to attempt this. His magical power was surging to the point of overflowing. His entire body felt unusually hot. Conversely, he must have accumulated a lot of fatigue too.

Now that Hal finally obtained reprieve for his tensed mind, his exhausted body was attacked by the onslaught of drowsiness.

"Senpai, did you fall asleep...?"

With his face buried in Hazumi's bosom, Haruomi-senpai drifted into slumber.

She could hear gentle breathing. Trying to avoid waking him up, Hazumi kept her movements as light as possible while shifting her arms and body to lay Senpai down on the bed.

Having confirmed that he was sleeping peacefully, Hazumi reached out again.

She touched Senpai's face. Not only was Haruomi-senpai not fat, his physique was on the skinny side. However, his cheeks were very soft and fleshy to pinch.

Then she even touched Senpai's head, right arm, left arm, feeling his body nonstop.

"Thank goodness. Looks like what I just did is working." Hazumi exhaled in relief and a smile finally surfaced on her face.

After that—after the Crimson Queen had used the technique of assured annihilation—Hazumi had felt bothered ever since.

Today, Haruomi-senpai was wearing a t-shirt with pants.

After using the technique of assured annihilation, the parts of his skin not covered by clothing, such as his face or his arms, would reflect sunlight from time to time, shining brightly. It did not seem like an illusion at all.

It shone as though the surface was covered by a layer of glass.

Worried, Hazumi had stuck closely to Senpai as soon as they had entered the cabin, so as to confirm the texture of his skin, and was greatly shocked.

In addition to appearance, even the tactile sensation was like glass.

Cold and hard.

Furthermore, Haruomi-senpai himself had failed to notice this. Most likely, this was one of the symptoms of transforming into a dragon—Hazumi felt certain of this. Just as he had been unaware of his memory loss, it was also very difficult for him to notice the hardening of his body.

Hence, Hazumi had forcibly suppressed the shock in her heart to prevent Senpai from noticing. However—

"I shouldn't have pointed out Senpai felt like metal to the touch..."

As soon as he heard these words, Senpai's face turned dark.

Hence, to make up for her mistake, she had hugged Haruomi-senpai's head. She guessed that such intimate contact might possibly cause Senpai's body to change in a positive direction.

After pressing her bosom against Senpai, she found the change she was hoping for.

Haruomi-senpai's hardened body gradually turned soft, recovering a human body's "pliable" texture.

"Fortunately, it's just like what Hinokagutsuchi said..."

Hazumi currently breathed a sigh of relief from the bottom of her heart. She even felt overjoyed.

"Senpai recovered... Does this mean that even a body like mine is able to make him happy?"

At New York during August, the former dragon queen had said, 'Obtaining combat power and the wisdom of the unorthodoxy would lead Tyrannois and hybrids to become more like dragons...'

'Conversely, the opposite situation can happen too. Pleasures that could only be enjoyed as a human would occasionally cause someone farther along the path of becoming a dragon to revert back to human appearance.'

Indeed. According to this logic, Senpai would derive intense satisfaction as a closet pervert from erotic behavior and revert slightly to being human.

Hence, Hazumi mustered her determination to give it a try this time.

If only things would continue to be this easy—Hazumi sighed with worry and suppressed the uncertainty in the bottom of her heart.

Part 3

"That silver dragon... Pavel Galad, yes?" Hinokagutsuchi spoke with mockery in her voice.

She was with Hal and Asya, walking in Kogetsu Academy's campus. Roughly half a day had gone by after the wielder of the dragonslaying sword had reappeared.

The morning sun they had witnessed from the tiny island in Tokyo Bay was already setting in the west. It was roughly 7pm right now.

"Yes. How did that dragon become so strong within just a few months? I can't believe even Hazumi-san's trump card didn't work..."

"Hmph, what is there to be surprised about?"

Asya was baffled while Hinokagutsuchi remained unfazed.

Inside the school, the young girl in a scarlet kimono should be quite conspicuous, but it was already after school and evening to boot. Practically no students could be seen along the path to the library.

Walking with her head up and chest puffed out, Hinokagutsuchi smiled arrogantly.

"The brat did it too. Do you believe the silver dragon to be less capable than he is?"

"I see, so that's the principle here?"

"Warrior, mage, hero... I'm confident that I'm inferior to him in talent for every job class," Hal could not help but agree.

Furthermore, Hinokagutsuchi continued, "If only that was all there is to it... Fully knowledgeable dragons would embark on long adventures for the sake of conquering the Road to Kingship. Up into the heavens, down into the oceans, deep into space, even crossing dimensions on occasion. Only by discovering flints and the power of dragonbane during their arduous travels can individuals become Tyrannoi—"

"A treasure hunting quest, in other words."

Hidden in the possessions left behind by Haruga Haruomi's late father was a treasure of dragonkind—a flint.

Only the flames generated when this type of stone shattered were able to awaken dragonslaying runes. Whether the Rune of the Bow or the Rune of the Twin Katana, both would be nothing more than symbols without the flints.

Hal had experienced this first hand. In other words—

"Having completed that challenging quest, Galad's abilities as a 'treasure hunter' might be superior to mine—I guess this could be a possible deduction..."

"The items and knowledge he obtained over the course of his travels ought to be quite abundant too..."

Previously, Pavel Galad had limited himself to "only sending the hero into battle."

But this time was different. Was he going to bring out all of his abilities in his attempt to defeat Haruga Haruomi followed by Princess Yukikaze?

After pointing this out, Hinokagutsuchi vanished into thin air.

They had reached the library, chatting while they walked. However, rather than the library, Hal and Asya's destination was the cultural clubs building opposite to it.

"Huh? No one's here."

Hal tilted his head. He had agreed to meet up with his companions here.

Juujouji Orihime, Shirasaka Hazumi, and Luna Francois. None of the trio were here.

"Let's get going first, since they will be coming later anyway. It'd be a hassle to keep that person waiting."

"You're right," Hal agreed with Asya's suggestion and walked up the stairs of the cultural clubs building.

The destination was the third floor. The room of the UFO Research Club.

"So you two have come."

The one they sought was waiting behind the door.

President of five cultural clubs, namely the Drama Club, the Mass Media Research Club, the Literature Club, the Science Insider Club, as well as the UFO Research Club, and at the same time, an extremely suspicious prophet.

Dressed in an outfit resembling maternity wear, gender indeterminate.

Her name was President M. Calling herself the "mother" of all club members, she was a superhuman unparalleled in both physical and mental greatness.

"I have been waiting here, focusing my mind, only because you lot requested for a discussion with me."

"Much appreciated. What we wanted to discuss is the same as what I mentioned over the phone last time," Hal immediately went straight to the point.

"I'll cut to the chase... We don't know if our enemy, who could potentially wreck Tokyo, be setting up some kind of trap?"

"How would I know? I am neither a clairvoyant nor Zhuge Kongming."

President M immediately offered a valuable oracle.

"Well, considering various circumstances, why not just handle things flexibly?"

"Is this a suggestion coming from one of your skills?"

"No, Haruga, this is simply my personal opinion and common sense."

"Hahahahaha."

Laughing wryly, Hal conversed with President M.

Forget it. He had not hoped for much to begin with. Trying to push the issue could end up bringing divine retribution. These were the feelings behind his wry smile.

Asya frowned.

"Can't we think of a solution? This is a crisis that could sink not only Tokyo but even all of Japan. It might even be the prelude to the world's destruction. Please offer us more of your guidance."

"My, how greedy you are."

They were on fairly good terms, perhaps because Asya had been under President M's tutelage on a one-to-one basis.

Asya made her request assertively, believing there was no need to be formal with President M. The prophet and possibly revolutionary species of human closed her eyes and began to meditate. The atmosphere was quite solemn.

"Let me see... From our conversation over the phone, there is one matter that bothers me greatly—That... trump card? ...Which the little angel used, you said the enemy blocked that move."

"Oh, yeah, that's right. The mystic ritual of a goddess to eliminate dragonslaying weapons." Asya nodded.

Still with her eyes closed, President M continued, "Rather than blocking it... The enemy rekindled the flame instead. That is the answer to the riddle."

"How did he do it?"

"I am not the one who should be figuring that out."

"Got it. Can you give us more concrete advice?"

"How shameless of you. When encountering situations where feminine charm cannot be applied, you really turn into a monster the farthest thing away from being useless."

"W-Why are you bringing up feminine charm now!?"

"Fine, fine—Oh, but I seem to be seeing something vaguely. Let me see, 'Counter a treasure with another treasure. You are advised to release the stored goods'."

"Such a cryptic oracle..."

"Something is better than nothing. A drowning man would gratefully grasp for even straws."

President M suddenly opened her eyes and stopped meditating.

It looked like that was her last piece of advice. As far as Hal and Asya knew so far, President M's prophesies always matched "the future's outline."

Hopefully, it would be the case this time too—

Regardless, the paradoxical being of the "Amazon of indeterminate gender" told Hal and Asya, "Allow me to add a final word. When it is time to make a decision, think about the future—three months from now, three years from now. What consequences will your decision have on the future... If you take that into consideration, things will work out perhaps?"

"In a way, the President might be the most reliable of all humans."

"That's because the President often gives us honest advice, though it's mostly impossible to understand."

"This time, she was like a real fortune-teller, leaving so much room for interpretation and concluding with a suggestion that's like life advice."

"I really wish she'd give hints that were easy to understand."

Hal and Asya exchanged remarks poignantly.

They had left the UFO Research Club's room and were standing in front of the clubs building again.

It was almost 8pm but Orihime, Luna, and Hazumi still had not arrived. They could not be reached by cellphone either. What happened?

While Hal was puzzling over this, Asya suddenly said, "Anyway, let's go. I think there must've been a minor mistake or accident. If it's a serious incident, I'm sure Hiiragi-san would contact us, so there shouldn't be anything to worry about."

She made a good point.

Hence, Hal and Asya began to wander aimlessly on campus during the evening.

The school yard was deserted. All the students in athletic teams and clubs had apparently gone home already. In an unexpected turn of events, Hal and Asya got to spend time alone with each other.

"But are you sure you don't need to have dinner?"

"I ate a sandwich before coming to school, so that's plenty enough."

Plenty enough! Hal could not believe he heard these words coming from Asya on the subject of eating.

The bottomless abyss of a stomach and humanoid typhoon—Recalling his childhood friend's former image, Hal was overcome with a strong wave of nostalgia.

But he ought to accept this sort of change with an open mind, probably.

Hal switched mindsets and decided to change the subject.

"Say, I never thought we'd be studying at a normal school."

"And we're taking our studies pretty seriously too."

"By the time I noticed, even though it's not a lot, I've gotten to know a couple of people I can call friends."

"Didn't you gain a whole bunch of female friends over the past six months?"

"Well yeah, but the people I know have always been skewed towards the female side. After all, my line of work revolves around witches."

"True, but—"

Walking side by side with Hal, Asya poked fun at him, "Haven't you always insisted you'd never date a witch?"

"That's because all witches are weird... No, all witches have too much personality. They're fine as coworkers, but dating is out of the question."

"That's what you claim, but what's the truth? Right now, Luna is pursuing you, Hazumi-san calls you 'Senpai♪' and super likes you, Orihime-san is on really good terms with you, and finally, even the WotC in New York..."

"Oh dear."

"But judging from the situation, it looks like you've retracted your statement."

"Retracted?"

"What you said just now, that 'dating is out of the question.' It's quite infuriating, but at the same time, I feel a sense of relief too."

"What do you mean?"

"Because—It means that I count as one of your romantic prospects."

"Huh...?"

Asya's sudden bomb drop caused Hal to freeze on the spot.

Just as he was thinking "what did Asya just say?" in surprise, the childhood friend continued.

"You still don't get it? I think of you as a prospective romantic partner and I want to go out with you—as girlfriend and boyfriend."

"....."

"Speaking of which, didn't we kiss in New York last time?"

"Oh—Uh... yeah."

"Then how much do you fail as a man if you still don't get how I feel? Yet when it comes to others, you're always so nitpicky."

Asya chuckled with a smile and looked up to gaze at Hal's face.

The two of them naturally stopped walking. The silver-haired childhood friend was shorter so of course, she had to look up. Hal's heart skipped a beat.

The way she was looking at him seemed to emphasize her adorable and fairy-like face.

Being together with Asya like this—It could very well be the first time.

Furthermore, her gorgeous lips looked irresistible, as though urging him to do something. All Hal needed to do was bend over slightly, and Asya to tiptoe a little, and they could probably touch. A kiss was within reach.

Hal was certain of this—then he jumped in fright. What on earth was he thinking?

He knew his heart was beating rapidly.

Hal was at a loss. The person in front of him was neither Luna Francois nor Juujouji Orihime, yet she was making him feel in this way...

In addition, he had no choice but to admit this.

At this very moment, Haruga Haruomi was seeing his childhood friend, whom he originally considered family, as a *girl*!

"U-Uh, although it was so long ago, New York, umm..."

"Those were my feelings for you. It was an action I took, hoping you'd understand that I love you."

Asya's response could not be more direct. There was no room to misinterpret.

"It's because I can't lose to Luna. Or Orihime-san. Or Hazumi-san."

"I-I don't think this is a contest..."

"No, but precisely this is the kind of issue we have here, winning and losing is quite important. Perhaps you're currently very conscious of the girls around you, causing you to spontaneously set your sights on others, making it hard for you to express a clear stance."

"I-It's not like that."

As soon as he spoke, Hal remembered last night.

This memory made Hal unable to make any counterarguments. While he was silent, Asya added, "Actually... I am very certain."

"Certain?"

"Yes. Even though you are surrounded by many girls right now, I'll definitely become number one in your heart."

"....."

Asya asserted with secret confidence in her words.

Adorable and mischievous, it seemed like she was teasing her childhood friend Hal.

There was an attractiveness in her movements and expression that Hal had never seen before. While surprised by this new side of Asya, whom he knew for so many long years, Hal also found it very novel and refreshing.

Faced with this Asya who was practically like a different person, Hal felt his heart pounding nonstop.

"Fufufufu. It's almost time to change the subject. Too serious a chat might affect tomorrow's decisive battle."

"I-I'm glad you're willing to change the subject."

"But Haruomi, please don't forget. Once the matters of Princess Yukikaze and Pavel Galad are resolved... I'll show you my true power."

"True power!?"

"Yes. I will make sure you know that even Luna, Orihime-san, and Hazumi-san will seem to have no presence when compared to my charm. Even someone as dense as you will be able to easily decide whom to choose."

Asya's gallant declaration sounded even a bit awesome.

Incredibly, her confidence and assertiveness did not feel off-putting. Rather, it would be better to say that it paired well to emphasize her coolness and charm.

Feeling that the gallant Asya from the battlefield seemed to be making an appearance in everyday life, Hal was rendered speechless. His childhood friend was undoubtedly a beautiful maiden of limitless attractiveness right now.

If he had to find a flaw to nitpick, there was only one thing at most.

Indeed. At most, there was a tiny sliver of doubt, was Haruga Haruomi's childhood friend really someone like this...?

"Okay, let me have a look over there."

After parting ways with Haruomi in the school yard, Asya went back the way she had come.

Her destination was somewhere between the cultural clubs building and the library. This time, instead of the UFO Research Club, she was headed to the underground level of the library.

She entered an underground floor that only SAURU personnel had authorized access.

Asya had locked one of the rooms there. Furthermore, this was Padlock magic cast by a master-class witch.

Finally releasing the lock, Asya stepped into the room.

"Sorry everyone, thanks for being patient."

Asya greeted first. Three girls responded to her.

"A-Asya-san!"

"My goodness! Where did you run off on your own while imprisoning us here!?"

"How dare you set a trap for me..."

Shirasaka Hazumi, Juujouji Orihime, and Luna Francois Gregory.

They were the trio who had failed to make the appointment. In fact, Asya had called them to the library's underground level ahead of time, trapping them here and confiscating their cellphones.

This was all done so that she could spend the evening with Haruomi alone.

The kindhearted Orihime and Hazumi simply looked uncomfortable, but Luna Francois was clearly very displeased.

Asya told her three companions very simply, "I went to see Haruomi—Since all of you have been secretly seducing the Haruga family's Haruomi-kun behind my back lately... Please allow me to ask—"

Deciding she should cut to the straight directly, Asya inquired, "What on earth are you trying to hide by excluding me?"

" \"!?" "

The two honest Japanese girls jumped in surprise and looked at Luna.

She was evidently the one who had issued the order to leave Asya out. The American girl shrugged and grumbled with displeasure, "You really haven't

been acting like yourself recently. I never thought you'd be woman enough to notice something like this."

"I am no longer my past self. Please don't underestimate me."

On the evening prior to the decisive battle, Asya's purpose for imprisoning the three girls was not just for the sake of spending time alone with Haruomi.

"Not just you three, but Haruomi himself is also acting sneaky."

"Indeed... Asya, I admit that you are no longer the same. The reason why I excluded you was because I feared your feminine charm was too lacking—"

"So that's why..."

"After all, this matter is of paramount importance to Harry currently. But since you have devoted so much thought into this already, perhaps I could allow you to help..."

Luna Francois sighed.

"But do know that this is a very depressing topic. The situation is more serious than Harry himself realizes and he will soon become cornered. Do you still wish to listen?"

"Gladly."

Step by step, Luna Francois began to explain the situation.

After understanding the whole story, Asya found her heart dominated by surprise and anxiety.

Part 4

Night went by and the promised day agreed with Pavel Galad arrived.

It was roughly 8am. The JMSDF dispatched an escort ship to sail towards the small island that had appeared off the coast of Urayasu. Both Hal and Asya were on the ship.

Seeing Hal suppress a yawn, Asya said to him, "How much sleep did you get last night?"

"Around five hours. I'd prefer if I could sleep for triple that amount of time, but there's an important event today, after all."

"Then the opening ceremony and the event itself would have to be canceled just because you overslept."

"I'd rather cancel it if that were possible, but I naturally woke up at dawn, probably because this event gives me stomach cramps."

The two of them were walking along the deck since there was nothing to do inside the ship. Staring off into Tokyo Bay, they waited for the operation to begin.

Hal and Asya's ship was not the only one to be mobilized.

In addition, there were two other escort ships and three submarines moving through these waters. A JASDF base nearby also had helicopters and fighter jets ready to sortie as dictated by the situation.

All this was for the sake of supporting Hal's team.

Incidentally, Orihime and Hazumi were participating in the operation on a separate ship.

As the commander, Luna Francois was working alongside the two Japanese girls.

Only the childhood friends combo of Hal and Asya were together on this ship, because the two of them had to serve as the vanguard and be the first to land on the island.

This was to avoid deploying all their forces at once and getting wiped out.

Their approach was the same as yesterdays, but the trump card would only be debuting today.

The combination of Haruga Haruomi with Asya and Rushalka was unsurpassed in all aspects including combat strength, adaptability, and coordination, making them the best suited to taking on this role.

Even Luna had not raised any objections.

Hence, Hal and his silver-haired childhood friend were together right now, enjoying the sea breeze.

(So I guess last night's topic of conversation will be postponed...)

Her declaration of "I'll show you my true power."

Asya had said she would put this matter aside for now because of today's decisive battle.

From their previous meeting several hours ago till now, Asya had not broached the subject again. Thanks to that, Hal was able to chat casually with her without worrying—

Leaning against the guardrail on the edge of the deck, Hal breathed a sigh of relief.

Asya suddenly came beside him.

Their elbows and upper arms were touching, a distance that was too close.

"A-Asya!?"

"Haruomi, let the two of us seize victory today. It's a promise, okay?"

With a calm and confident expression, his childhood friend smiled at him.

Her adorability and her fairy-like beauty amplified each other, leaving a deep impression in Hal's mind, setting his heart pounding.

Fufu.

Leaning close to Haruomi, Asya nodded mentally to herself while maintaining the refreshing smile on her face.

Just as she expected, Haruomi was unsettled. Every attack from her, conducted with feigned naturalness, were striking right on target. There was no better description than "Just as planned!"

Asya was certain that the two of them, leaning close together on the escort ship's deck, definitely looked like a young and inexperienced couple to the eyes of outsiders!

Of course, they might feel that it would be unseemly for them to be acting lovey-dovey just before a crucial and decisive battle.

However, Asya had learned the bad news of "Haruga Haruomi was currently turning into a dragon" through last night's interrogation...

The trio of Orihime, Luna, and Hazumi seemed to be hiding something—

The past Asya most likely would not have noticed, but in her current state with augmented womanly powers, she had discovered the symptoms, just like how she sensed danger during battles.

Obtaining dragonslaying runes had forced her childhood friend to confront a life-threatening crisis.

Now that she knew, there was no way she would not provide assistance. Making physical contact with him unobtrusively, or touching him directly, she would repeat this again and again, so as to contribute to Haruomi's recovery!

It was also thanks to her augmented womanly powers that Asya was able to come to this decision.

(I knew it, that magic is so useful!)

Hypnosis magic had resulted in an unnatural increase of abilities like doping.

Just as Asya was overjoyed at its effects from the bottom of her heart, next to her, Haruomi suddenly spoke, "I-I'm going for a drink of water."



"Sure. I'll wait for you here."

Haruomi turned around and left, looking like he could not withstand the insane pounding of his heart.

He was distracted and there was a lack of calmness in his expression, tone, and movements. However, he did not look unhappy. Rather it was because he was too conscious of Asya's "girlishness."

Asya felt satisfied and fulfilled as never before.

She had been fighting dragons since childhood, but combat and victory had never brought her such a strong sense of fulfillment...

Humming happily, Asya unintentionally slipped her hand into her pocket.

She was wearing her usual military jacket, but it was time for her to buy a new one. There must be clothing more suited to her—

"Oh?"

There was a memo in her pocket.

She unfolded it and saw the words "it will be too late by the time you regret it," written in red. This bubbly handwriting was familiar to Asya. For the past few months, she had been training herself under this person's tutelage. And this handwriting was identical to what this person had wrote on whiteboards and notebooks...

Come to think of it, Asya's breakfast this morning consisted of a banana and a cup of cafe au lait.

"It'll be fine. I managed to pull through during the battle against Hannibal too. I... should be able to do it!"

As though engaging in self-suggestion, Asya voiced the words in her heart.

The ship had already arrived near the island that was to serve as a special arena. The plan was for Asya and Haruomi to land here as the vanguard to fight against Pavel Galad—

Instantly tossing matters of love to the back of her mind, Asya began to focus on combat.

This was a job she had been doing since childhood. Again, she would return to form as "Anastasya Rubashvili, Europe's strongest Shootdown Ace."

Asya had a feeling.

Seeing her in action, Haruomi would most likely become captivated by her all over again.

At that moment, a giant silver-white body flew in from the southern sky.

Pavel Galad, the elite dragon that had inherited the dragonslaying Rune of the Sword. Even though she was familiar with this mortal enemy's appearance, Asya doubted her own eyes.

"Four of them?"

Indeed. There was more than one silver-white dragon of the sword.

Four dragons, identical to him in appearance, were approaching, flying in formation like a squadron of fighter jets.

"Magic of Ruruk Soun!?"

An alarm of "Dragons sighted!" blared inside the ship.

Hearing the alarm, Hal rushed out to the deck and looked at the southern sky using the magic of Enhanced Vision. Four Pavel Galads were approaching at high speed.

There were seven magical symbols behind the four dragons.

Naturally, runes of Ruruk Soun. They signified "clones."

" " " "Hohohoho. Welcome, humans!" " " "

The four Pavel Galads spoke simultaneously.

His stylish and beautiful voice resounded all around the island serving as the duel arena.

The real one should be hidden among the four dragons. Presumably, the other three were either illusions or fake copies of Pavel Galad created using magic.

However, even through the eyes of a Tyrannos, it was impossible to tell which was the genuine article!

The intricacy of these counterfeits was praiseworthy, succeeding in confusing Hal's faction.

"Followers of my mortal rival, good work so far—But pray forgive me!"

"This is a duel between successors to dragonslaying runes!"

"There is no room for interference from you humans!"

"Please leave immediately!"

One after another, the four silver dragons declared war.

Undisguised in each of their right hands was a longsword—

The dragonslaying sword, of course. The four longswords shot out lightning from their blades, launching an indiscriminate attack in all directions, striking the sea surface and the escort ships carrying Hal and the others. Perhaps even the submarines underwater were caught in the attack.

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

Hal's escort ship was struck on the side by the lightning and about to be sunk—No.

"Rushalka, use imperishable protection!"

Hal heard his childhood friend issue a command.

The blue wyvern materialized in the sky over the escort ship, giving off pearly radiance from her entire body.

This was "imperishable protection," the defensive barrier protecting dragon kings and Tyrannoi. This glow enveloped not only Rushalka but also the escort ship, blocking dragonkind's lightning in the nick of time.

As expected of Asya the Shootdown Ace, she managed to protect the ship with her swift reaction.

As for the other escort ship...

Akurou-Ou, Minadzuki, and Glinda—Three leviathans had appeared in the sky above it.

The nine-tailed fox-wolf, the emerald serpentine dragon, and the three-headed lion chimera. These three leviathans also deployed imperishable protection to defend their ship from Galad's lightning attack.

However—

There was another escort ship that had neither witches nor leviathans on board.

That ship was struck directly by the lightning and could only sink into the sea!

The human side swiftly mustered a counterattack against the four silver dragons responsible for the destruction. From close range, the ships carrying Hal and Orihime launched anti-air missiles designed for a range within thirty kilometers while firing 127mm machine guns continuously, aiming at the silver dragon and his three clones!

However, the four Pavel Galads also glowed with pearly radiance.

Imperishable protection. These barriers were difficult to breach unless using attacks on the level of assured annihilation techniques. Naturally, human attacks were thoroughly blocked, a mockery of their impotence.

"Well, not surprising..." As someone equipped with the same defenses, Hal muttered to himself.

However, he immediately went "Huh!?", doubting his vision.

"Glinda—is falling?"

Indeed. Luna Francois' partner started to crash.

The lion leviathan was supposed to be flying in the sky to intercept the four silver dragons.

Her majestic figure crashed helplessly towards the surface of Tokyo Bay, almost as though someone had ordered her to "jump into the sea."

Simply floating on the sea like a buoy, Glinda did not return to the battlefield.

She remained motionless. Incidentally, in the next instant, Akurou-Ou and Minadzuki—the partners of the Japanese witches—also fell into the sea.

Like Glinda, these two leviathans were also floating on the sea.

"What the heck is going on!?"

His companions on the other ship were apparently confronting some kind of emergency.

Just as Hal was about to check on their status using his cellphone—no, the power of the runes—he heard his childhood friend's acute voice.

"Haruomi, let me use the Rune of the Bow!"

The silver-haired beauty was running towards him.

Her face was beautiful as ever, but the vibe was completely different from just earlier. She not only looked cool but also dignified and fearless. For some reason, Hal breathed a sigh of relief.

Asya's warrior expression was the look familiar to Hal.

"No matter what, Rushalka must singlehandedly oppose those four dragons at the same time. The rune is essential!"

"Got it! Do it however you want—"

"As if I would allow you to do as you wish."

The instant Hal was responding to Asya's request, someone interrupted their exchange.

Out of the blue, a SDF officer walked up to the two of them.

The man was wearing the predominantly white uniform of the JMSDF, but for some reason, Hal could not get a clear view of his face. Something haze-like was obscuring his face.

Hal realized with sudden alarm that this was stealth magic.

"Witches... Isn't that what your ilk is called? I apologize for ambushing small fry like you, certainly a taint on the honor of dragonkind, but— Honestly, you lot are very much in my way."

This beautifully masculine voice belonged to Pavel Galad.

The SDF officer of unknown appearance extended his right hand. A symbol consisting of three "<" in a series appeared on his palm.

It was the Rune of the Sword. Pavel Galad's mark.

Aiming at the silver-haired beauty, the mysterious SDF officer fired white light from his rune—!

"Asya!"

The instant Hal came to his senses, he summoned the magic gun to his right hand.

Fire. Without hesitation, he opened fire on the SDF officer. Imperishable protection was deployed, defending his entire body, resisting Hal's attack.

However, the impact caused the SDF officer to lose aim.

The light fired by the SDF officer, meant to pierce Asya, ended up missing her, deviating to the right slightly.

"Well defended, Haruga Haruomi."

Despite failing to strike his target, the SDF officer spoke in a carefree manner.

The haze obscuring his face dissipated. A head of silver hair. Pale complexion, handsome face. Hal remembered this face, which he had seen once before—It was Pavel Galad's human form.

In the next instant...

"En garde!"

Galad in human form charged forward with a thrust of his longsword!

Hal blocked the blade using imperishable protection. Naturally, the sword was the dragonslaying sword. Instantly, the opponent's attire transformed into a summer jacket, a shirt, and pants, probably disguised using illusory magic previously.

"So the four dragons rampaging in the air—They're all fake!?"

"Smart as always. I had considered, if presented with the opportunity... I would attack your retainers in this form, to eliminate them secretly."

"!?"

"Nevertheless, as one might expect of your followers, they were all very sharp and alert. I had a feeling that it would not be easy to dispose of them even if I disguised my appearance, hence—"

Hal was in shock for a moment, but immediately stopped worrying.

He was originally afraid that the three leviathans had crashed because something had happened to the witches, but that was apparently not the case. Even now, Asya had started to sprint at full speed, distancing herself from Galad's human form.

She ran into the ship from the deck to avoid getting in Hal's way.

"Anyway, Haruomi! I'm leaving the rest to you!"

Asya never did anything reckless beyond the limits of her own abilities.

Impressive as always, the judgment of a seasoned warrior. However—Runes of Ruruk Soun suddenly appeared under her feet, signifying a "binding curse."

Asya's sprint was halted unnaturally.

The silver-haired childhood friend had been immobilized by restraining magic!

"Asya!"

Hal yelled then witnessed with his own eyes.

Soaring gallantly in the sky, Rushalka stopped flapping her wings and crashed.

After falling into Tokyo Bay, she floated helplessly on the sea surface like timber from a shipwreck. The other three leviathans were in the same state.



"You used the same 'binding curse' on the others too!?"

"Yes. As for you—I would like us to embark on a journey together."

Runes of Ruruk Soun were shining over the head of Galad's human form.

A total of four runes. Their arrangement signified High-Speed Flight. Hal's body immediately floated off the ground.

"Haruomi!?"

Even though her body could not move, Asya could still use her voice, apparently. Hal heard her scream in surprise.

However, Hal did not stop flying as a result, Together with Galad's human form, he rose up gradually, flying away from his childhood friend and the escort ship.

"Sure enough, transforming into a human is quite tiring."

Galad's human form began to shapeshift in front of him.

Within the blink of an eye, the handsome young man turned into a silver-white elite dragon. His height also increased all at once from 180cm or so to a body length of seventeen or eighteen meters.

"Where are you taking me!?"

"First to Tokyo, I suppose. Now that I have eliminated the hindrances around you, Haruga Haruomi, I should be able to take my time dealing with you..."

Hearing that "hindrances" were "eliminated," Hal looked downwards in shock.

Thirteen runes of Ruruk Soun had appeared on the sea surface. They were extremely large, almost the same size as the 130m-long escort ship.

The arrangement signified "Open, door to another world."

Teleportation magic. A spell for transporting objects to another location...

"I'm not letting you succeed!"

"Excuse me, but those are exactly my words to you."

Hal immediately used Dispel magic, trying to erase the teleportation spell.

Dispel failed to produce any effect. Upon closer examination, he noticed that runes of Ruruk Soun for "spell resistance" had appeared before the chest of his enemy's gigantic body, having returned to a dragon's form.

Negating magic cast at extremely close range, it was a type of defensive magic.

Breaking through this spell required pouring in magic on the level of a technique of assured annihilation or pulling the spellcaster away to create some distance—That was what his magic wand, the magic gun, told him.

But it was too late.

The leviathans floating on the sea—Rushalka, Akuro-Ou, Minadzuki, and Glinda had disappeared, sucked away by the thirteen runes of "Open, door to another world."

This was not offensive magic burying them at the bottom of the sea or annihilating them completely.

Instead, it transported them to somewhere else.

"Asya! Juujouji! Shirasaka! Luna!"

Hal kept calling out to his companions. Not only were they companions but also individuals who were connected to Hal through magical bonds, hence, he immediately noticed.

(...They're gone.)

No matter how loudly he yelled or how desperately he searched, he could not reach the girls.

Haruga Haruomi's retainers—their very existence—had vanished off the face of the Earth. Even though instinct told him that the four girls were not dead, Hal still felt that they *did not exist* anywhere on the Earth...

Galad's mystic spell of "Open, door to another world."

This magic's terrifying effects caused not only the leviathans but also their partners to vanish from the escort ships.

"Where did you transfer them to!?"

"...All I can tell you is none of the above. Try to search carefully after you defeat me."

Hal interrogated the dragon in front of him, but the other party remained nonchalant.

While Galad was moving Hal to Tokyo at lightning speed, Hal wanted to sigh from the bottom of his heart.

"You put that island in such a conspicuous spot simply as a diversion?"

"Yes, indeed. Anything would have sufficed. So long as it drew your attention—preventing you from realizing my intentions."

"So separating me from the witches was also part of your plan."

Were their positions reversed, Hal definitely would have done the same, Hal thought gloomily.

The first step towards cornering Haruga Haruomi required eliminating the witches who assisted him.

"Still, I never thought I'd fall into your trap..."

The obsession with victory belonging to the warrior race of dragonkind.

And the meticulous caution lacking in the warrior race of dragonkind.

Having witnessed how terrifying his old foe had become after changing his ways, Hal gulped hard. How much resistance could he put up against such a monster?

Guarded by pearly protection, his body and mind were tensing up from uncertainty and nervousness.

Once again, Hal became painfully aware that "I'm not suited to battle after all." Haruga Haruomi was a not a fighter whose will to fight would ignite under such circumstances.

Even so, he had no choice but to take the bull by the horns.

Driven by duty rather than fighting spirit, Hal yelled with reckless abandon, "Queen, I beg you! Act as my limbs and settle the fight with this guy!"

With Tokyo New Town as the stage, the second round of the duel between Tyrannoii was finally beginning.

Chapter 3 - New Town in Turmoil

Part 1

At Kogetsu Academy, Year 1 Class F was having second period.

Attendance was roughly down by 20% from the beginning of the first school term, due to the frequent dragon strikes in recent months.

Furthermore, three regular attendees were absent today.

Haruga Haruomi, Anastasya Rubashvili, and Juujouji Orihime—

To Mutou-san and Funaki-san, they were friends and "colleagues." Though they did not know the precise reason, the two girls realized vaguely that something big must have happened seeing as three important members of Tokyo's defense line, *involved in the field of fighting dragons*, were absent at the same time...

Perhaps because of that...

In the middle of second period, when the speakers installed all around town suddenly broadcast an emergency evacuation alarm, Mutou-san and Funaki-san were not surprised at all.

'Citizens, please remain calm and head over to the designated shelters—'

The female voice announced the approaching of dragons and the need to evacuate. Notifications for guiding citizens to evacuate also arrived one after another on their cellphones.

During this time, most of the people in the class were quite calm.

At most, there were a few anxious students. After all, they were living in the twenty-first century, an era when the existence of dragons had become taken for granted.

Just as they were preparing to evacuate in an orderly manner—

"Kyahhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

Noticing something alarming outside, a female student near the window screamed.

She pointed outside. Two giant creatures were flying at low altitude—around a hundred meters. One was crimson, the other was silver-white.

Of course, the two creatures were dragons, but both were much larger in size than Raptors.

In addition, both were giving off pearly glows that looked like barriers.

The silver-white dragon held onto the crimson dragon tightly, even using its right forelimb to choke the opponent's throat, dragging the crimson dragon towards the Sumida River!

"Isn't that the dragon from last time!?"

Seeing the silver monster, Mutou-san stood up.

Before the summer holiday, she had met a handsome young man by chance. Before parting ways, he had transformed into that silver dragon, in the same manner as space warriors whose color schemes chiefly consisted of red and silver.

"These two would both be categorized as elite dragons."

Through her classmate Haruga Haruomi, she had learned a great deal about dragons. That power and gigantic body, as well as the glint of intellect in their eyes. Unmistakable.

"I never thought I'd see this in person one day..." murmured Mutou-san, utterly moved.

However, the surrounding people were not as laid back.

The two elite dragons had flown past extremely close by, almost brushing the edge of the school yard. Furthermore, their bodies seem to be releasing magic-like energy, causing the classroom windows to suddenly shatter all at once.

"Kyahhh!" "Wahhh!?"

Girls screamed again, followed by that of boys.

Fortunately, class was in progress, otherwise, students next to the windows would have gotten hurt.

Thanks to lesson time, everyone were at their seats and nobody was injured by the broken glass. However—

Instead, chaos broke out. Students and even the teacher rushed out of the classroom in panic, fighting towards the stairs, trying to leave the school as quickly as possible.

The students running in the corridor were not limited to those of Year 1 Class F.

The other homerooms—no, the entire school—were doing the same. An astounding number of students were congesting the corridors completely.

That being said, around a quarter of the students still remained calm.

They were calling to the other students, telling them to calm down, but to no avail.

Naturally, Mutou-san was among the calm minority.

"...Listen to me."

Someone tugged at her uniform sleeve. It was the twintailed girl, Funaki-san.

"Judging from the situation, we won't be able to evacuate for the time being. Wanna go see what's up with those two dragons?"

"Oh, good idea."

Funaki-san pointed at the classroom ceiling and Mutou-san immediately understood.

"Then let's go?"

"Yeah. Say, once we find that silver dragon, does that mean we'll be able to see that handsome guy again?"

"Assuming he—that dragon—is willing to transform for us."

The two of them left the classroom.

Shoving and squeezing, they made their way arduously to the stairs. Year 1 Class F was located on the fourth floor of the five-story school building. Compared to the school entrance on the ground floor, going up was an easier destination of course.

Furthermore, everyone else was moving downwards.

Hence, the two girls arrived at the *roof* relatively easily.

"Eh? It's the prez!"

Seeing someone already on the roof, Mutou-san jumped in surprise.

It was the senior student and president of the UFO Research Club—President M.

"It appears that you and I thought the same."

A hundred and twenty kilograms by visual estimates, the president was standing there with Old Tokyo's scenery as a backdrop.

The Old Tokyo Concession was actually less than a kilometer away from Ryougoku where the school was located.

Tokyo's former city center—the Yamanote Line, Shinjuku, Shibuya, Roppongi and other urban areas had become a wasteland of scrap iron and debris, silent and desolate.

However, Old Tokyo's landmark remained intact to this day.

The Monolith, a triangular prism of pure black, stood at the land that used to be called "Ginza." Towering at a height of a thousand meters, it could be seen very clearly from the school.

"The two dragons crashed over there."

President M pointed north—towards Komagata and the Azuma Bridge.

It was near the Sumida River. This first-class river served as a boundary between Tokyo New Town on its east and the Old Tokyo Concession on its west. Komagata was clearly on the east bank...

Mutou-san was stunned.

"Meaning that there are two dragons in New Town, hostile to us..."

"In my opinion, I don't think both dragons are hostile."

"What do you mean by that!?"

"The red one is probably Haruga's dragon."

"Really!? Then things might not be as serious as they seem!" Funaki-san exclaimed happily.

President M's superpowers—or rather, psychic abilities—seemed capable of seeing into the future. Not only Mutou-san but Funaki-san too were aware of President M's prowess, but—

"However, his situation does not look good either. I feel... that Haruga is fighting alone, apparently separated from his companions."

"Ehhh!?"

"At this rate... It might be over for him."

President M exhaled solemnly with a "mm-hmm."

The two first-year students held their breaths and stared at the weirdest weirdo in the school with uncertainty.

Part 2

"O wisdom of Ruruk Soun, grant me power!"

"What he said. Grant me power too! Please!"

The two Tyrannoii recited incantations for using magic.

Pavel Galad was using the magic of High-Speed Flight to soar the sky. This was magic allowing dragons to increase their flight speed dramatically, breaking the sound barrier.

However, Hal also invoked the magic of Telekinesis.

This was to use an invisible force to impede the enemy's supersonic flight.

The silver dragon's speed was supposed to be able to reach Mach 10 or even Mach 20.

Hal's telekinesis was limiting the speed to fifty or sixty kilometers per hour. However, Galad was using his own telekinesis to counter Hal's, causing their speed to become comparable to that of an automobile on a highway. Moving from off the shore of Urayasu to Tokyo New Town, they crossed the Sumida River—

Finally, they crashed somewhere in the Asakusa area in the Old Tokyo Concession.

Asakusa was an urban area famous for tourist attractions such as Kaminarimon and Sensō-ji. The two elite dragons, one crimson and the other silver-white, both slid across the wasteland of former Asakusa like baseball players.

Smashing into a high-rise building near Asakusa Station, they finally stopped.

Pavel Galad happened to end up on top of the Crimson Queen. At that instant, Hal ordered the queen, "Kick him!"

"Take that!"

"Hohohoho. Your strength has increased!"

Galad was sent flying, kicked by the queen's left hind leg.

However, the kick that should have sunk into the silver-white belly was blocked by imperishable protection, leaving the dragon hero completely unscathed.

Still, the queen was likewise unscathed too.

The queen launched seven runes of Ruruk Soun like a restraining device to seal off the opponent's movements. Since this did not inflict physical damage, imperishable protection could not be used to defend against it.

However, Pavel Galad was all too familiar with handling this type of magic. Extending his left palm, he blocked the seven runes shot out by the Crimson Queen.

"O shield for purifying vicious magic!"

Two runes of Ruruk Soun appeared on his silver-white palm.

Signifying "shield of the sacred spirit," it was magic for sealing away evil curses. The queen's immobilizing curse clashed with this runic arrangement and vanished without a trace.

"So the enemy holds the upper hand in mage technique, huh?" Hal remarked quietly.

Using two types of Ruruk Soun magic simultaneously and instantly selecting appropriate incantations as counters, the pureblooded elite dragon was still the better mage.

However, Hal had his own advantage.

"Solomon-senpai—Lend me your power."

King of ancient Israel and great sorcerer of old, Solomon.

During the summer vacation, the Crimson Queen had swallowed his soul together with the Rune of the Ring. The great king's soul was currently akin to Haruga Haruomi's servant.

By allowing the queen's heartmetal to unleash its full power, combined with Solomon's ring and spiritual energy—

"Oh?"

"This move was able to oppose Hannibal at least...!"

Hal had been in this same state during the decisive battle against the red dragon king in New York.

Back then, King Solomon was helping him with ulterior motives, but now, Hal was had the great king and the ring's power under his full control.

With a body length close to twenty meters, the queen was shrouded in a platinum glow.

"The Rune of the Bow—" Hal muttered, feeling deeply that this very moment, the queen had obtained magical power surpassing Pavel Galad's.

"I'm leaving the rest to you!"

Spreading out the pair of crimson wings, the crimson dragon took off from the ground again.

The dragonslaying bow manifested in the left hand while a fireball appeared in the right. The queen placed the fireball on the bowstring, drew the bow, and fired.

"This power rivals that of the vaunted dragon kings... Splendid!"

"Here goes!"

The fireballs multiplied into nine and crashed towards the ground.

Every fireball was targeting the massive silver-white body. A full burst technique of assured annihilation. The dragonslaying sword suddenly manifested in Pavel Galad's hand too.

"O sword, immolate..."

The familiar longsword began to change.

Like yesterday, the body of the blade burned with blue flames, together with fourteen runes of Ruruk Soun encircling the blade...!

The arrangement signified "I am the user of the sword of divine alacrity."

"Sever with haste the inauspicious instruments that begrudges dragons!"

With lightning speed, Pavel Galad swung his sword nine times.

The blazing longsword instantly pierced the nine fiery projectiles. The entire process might have taken less than a tenth of a second.

Furthermore, the fiery projectiles instantly vanished after being pierced by the tip of the sword...

Nine consecutive thrusts executed with miraculous speed of the sword. However, what Hal noticed was something else.

"The Rune of the Sword—hasn't it become more powerful than before?"

The Bow and the Sword. Two powers of dragonbane, their techniques of assured annihilation clashing, erasing each other.

This was the exchange just now. However, a draw could not occur unless both sides were virtually equal in power. The weaker side would have been blown away. When invoking the technique of assured annihilation, the Crimson Queen had used dragon king-class magical power.

The fact that Galad's sword could stand up to her implied that his sword had dragon king-class power too, right?

"In that case, here I go again!"

"The outcome is not going to change. Bring it on!"

The queen fired nine fireballs again and the silver dragon pierced them all with nine consecutive thrusts.

The same pattern of exchanges repeated like a replayed video. In other words, the power that Pavel Galad demonstrated earlier was not coincidence...!

"It appears that neither you nor the Flame Emperor noticed that—"

The silver dragon began to speak. The Flame Emperor was how dragonkind addressed Hannibal the dragon king.

"I sent minions specialized in stealth to the North American continent to record the battle between you two. Haruga Haruomi has come to possess power approaching that of the dragon kings. This is a fact long known to me."

"Here you go again, using little tricks that don't match your image."

Hal frowned and casually mocked Galad.

"This sort of stuff should be left to small potatoes like me. You should keep maintaining your dignity as one of the strong."

"Hmm. I am precisely imitating *what you would do.*"

Galad's response was unexpected. Then he said something even more surprising to the stunned Hal.

"In order to surpass you, I studied and analyzed the man named Haruga Haruomi, as well as the race called humanity. In the end, this is what I think—As a human, you have many ways of doing things that are worth learning from... Want to try imitating?"

"W-What are you talking about?"

"Fettered by the ways of dragonkind, it is impossible to become king. In that case, the only solution is to change myself. Hohohoho, you taught me this, you know?"

Pavel Galad seemed to be thanking him.

Hal was dumbstruck. The dragon hero proceeded to give him an even greater shock.

"However, I am not the only one who changed, you know? Speaking of which, you are the first to transform into a non-human creature."

"Huh?"

"You were no longer human the instant you absorbed a dragon king's heartmetal."

"....."

"Then after that, you kept growing as a non-human practitioner of magic, obtaining sufficient power to outclass us Zizou in such short time—In fact, I was quite touched yesterday to witness how much you have changed."

Pavel Galad's voice was trembling with excitement.

Evidently, despite his shift in philosophy and pragmatism, his hot-blooded personality remained wholly intact. However, Hal noticed something.

The whole time, this Galad bastard hasn't looked at me at all when speaking to me.

"Acquiring a heartmetal and magical power beyond human has led to gradual changes in your physical body. From what I have heard, this happens to the majority of human Tyrannoī—Will Haruga Haruomi follow the same path, I wonder?"

Currently, the silver-white dragon was gazing at the Crimson Queen.

The silver dragon was staring into the eyes of the giant red dragon as though conversing to Haruga Haruomi himself while holding the dragonslaying sword in his silver right hand.

—Hold on a sec, where the hell am I?

Hal finally discovered that he had started hovering above ground at some point!

He was floating in the air, roughly ten meters away from Galad and the queen.

While clothed, his body was exhibiting translucence.

(This isn't corporeal... Am I in a state similar to a soul!?)

He immediately corrected himself. Not "similar to" but he was in fact a spiritual entity.

All the things he had said to Pavel Galad just now had been transmitted out from the Crimson Queen's heartmetal.

Most likely, the silver-white dragon did not even see Hal's spiritual entity.

(Or rather, it's possible that my real body is about to turn into the queen.)

This terrifying possibility occurred to him.

Were he corporeal right now, he would most likely be trembling all over. Meanwhile, Pavel Galad grew more and more elated.

"I isolated you from those imitations and witches in order to secure my victory. Now that you are alone and unaided, together with my minions, I shall take care of you."

He pointed the tip of his dragonslaying sword to the sky.

Hal guessed that runes of Ruruk Soun would appear and he was right. However, Hal paled in alarm when he saw the massive rune in the sky.

The Rune of the Sword in the air, consisting of three inequality signs of "<" in a series.

Its size was frightening. If one were to draw a circle around this dragonslaying rune, the circumference would probably reach forty kilometers.

That would be comparable to the length of the Yamanote Line encircling Tokyo in the past.

The excessively large Rune of the Sword began to descend, scattering tiny golden particles across Tokyo New Town as though it were snowing.

No way—Hal gulped.

Was Pavel Galad intending to conduct some kind of large-scale magical ritual on all of Tokyo New Town?

Through the Crimson Queen, he transmitted a message to Galad.

"I heard you've been lurking all over Tokyo for the past two months... Sure enough, you've set up that crazy looking magic, right?"

This was not confirmation. Hal was already certain.

"What exactly did you do?"

"Anything too obvious would have been discovered by your faction. I simply synthesized some steel and mixed it into the large amount of stone and metal used in the construction of this city of Tokyo, thereby allowing it to react swiftly and sensitively to my magic."

"Speaking of which, alchemy is your specialty too..."

Synthesizing all kinds of enchanted metals according to their purpose then imbuing them with magical power.

Alchemy magic was Pavel Galad's specialty. Doing all this singlehandedly, and only requiring two months, this was impossible for any ordinary human.

However, if one applied the skills of elite dragons—

This would be nothing difficult. What exactly was going to happen next?

BOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOOM!

The instant Hal wondered, he heard a thunderous crash.

"!?"

The two of them were at Sumida Park on the shore of the Sumida River.

A fairly large park in Tokyo New Town, this was a famous spot for flower viewing. Next to it, parallel to the Sumida River, was the New Town Expressway, previously called the Shuto Expressway.

A portion of this highway suddenly exploded.

The raised section and the massive supporting pillar underneath it exploded without warning, sending concrete debris of varying sizes flying in all directions.

...In addition, what looked like steel rods could be seen mixed among the fragments and debris of the explosion.

The steel rods began to twist and deform, turning into the shape of a creature's skeleton within the blink of an eye.

Concrete fragments adhered to it one after another.

"Is this a type of golem...?"

Hal witnessed the birth of a magic creature formed from concrete and a steel skeleton. Its size and shape was quite similar to a Raptor.

And there were more than one. The scattered fragments were all combining, transforming.

At a rough estimate, there were two hundred?

Their shapes were not identical either. Most looked like Raptors, but others resembled serpents, insects, fish, etc...

Featuring a body length of around seven meters, every golem flew into the air.

"Rune of Ruruk Soun..."

Hal immediately used magic. The single rune for Eye appeared.

This rune rose into the sky, offering an overhead view of the scenery below, a type of magic to facilitate the gathering of intelligence.

Just as he suspected, the same calamity was happening all over New Town. Hal was not surprised at all, but a little speechless.

"In other words..."

The explosion of the expressway in front of Hal and Galad's location at Sumida Park was not the only one.

A large number of golems were emerging from Horikiri, Mukoushima, Ryougoku, the Kiyosu Bridge and dozens of other locations.

Hal now understood Pavel Galad's plan.

"Using steel and concrete from buildings all over Tokyo as materials, you're trying to make a huge number of golems—An army under your command!"

In contrast, none of Hal's companions were by his side.

The witches and leviathans aiding him were all absent.

Isolated without reinforcements, did Haruga Haruomi have a chance of winning? A battle with dismal prospects was about to begin.

Part 3

Tokyo was meant to be protected by four witches.

However, they had all fallen victim to Pavel Galad's mystic technique, disappearing from Tokyo Bay together with their four partners, the "serpents."

At the same time, the witches also gradually lost consciousness—This went on for a few minutes.

When they woke up, they first jumped in surprise. The situation was completely unexpected.

"Weren't we at Tokyo Bay? When did we teleport to these whatever sand dunes? Sand dunes of a certain prefecture where major cafe chains and convenience stores are pitifully lacking."

Luna Francois was grumbling with displeasure.

The four girls were currently on sandy ground.

White sand dominated the view as far as the eye could see, looking as though it stretched all the way to the other side of the horizon. It was vast enough that one could call it a desert. Instead of Tokyo Bay, this was a sea of sand.

"That being said, it is doubtful whether this is within the borders of Japan itself," Luna remarked sardonically.

The sky was gray.

However, this was not due to overcast weather, because there was not a single cloud in the sky. As though painted by watercolors, the sky itself was wholly gray without even a sun.

The air temperature was around twenty-eight degrees Celsius. Definitely not cool but not unbearably hot either.

It was impossible for a desert to have no wind, yet the air was completely still here. This was an anomalous world lacking in this thing and that.

Luna Francois shrugged and said to her fellow master-class witch, "Asya, can you send Rushalka out to scout?"

"Understood. But instinct tells me... Don't get your hopes up about finding useful information about this extremely bizarre space."

"I agree. I'm willing to bet a hundred US dollars that this isn't Earth."

"Because this place is definitely too weird."

While the two witches were discussing this anomalous world, next to them, Juujouji Orihime said to her cousin Hazumi, "Hazumi, have you noticed anything?"

"Well, Nee-sama, Minadzuki says that this place is very similar to Solomon-san's barrier that trapped Senpai and me during the summer vacation. The feeling seems to be the same..." The introverted Hazumi reported timidly.

Asya and Luna Francois nodded and remarked poignantly with a look of comprehension.

"Well, there you have it."

"We've been rendered captives in a dragon's castle?"

"Separating us from Haruomi so as to defeat each in isolation. Although it doesn't match the battle maniac style of the dragons, it's definitely a commonly used and wise tactic."

King Solomon had created an astoundingly vast barrier inside his ark and invited Haruga Haruomi as his guest. Pavel Galad was a Tyrannos like King Solomon, but his power level was thoroughly superior.

Even if he was using the same kind of barrier as King Solomon did, it would not be strange at all.

Ten-odd minutes passed.

"Anyway, I'll have Rushalka make one round."

The blue wyvern flew over Asya and the witches' heads.

Rushalka's flying speed was especially fast among "serpents," possibly unparalleled. Precisely because of that, she had been chosen for reconnaissance.

"A few dozen kilometers to the northwest, there's something resembling a set of ruins. Fairly large. No creatures such as dragons."

"Even if there aren't any right now, any number of them could be summoned if magic is used," Luna Francois replied.

Asya concurred, "I agree. Also, this is a completely barren land with nothing apart from that set of ruins, just as we suspected."

"I suppose the only way to break out of our predicament is to pay this place a visit? Let's take potential trouble into consideration."

"There is also the option of staying here, waiting for a rescue that may or may not arrive, but without food and water, who knows how long we can hold out for."

"With neither a roof nor walls, plus sand everywhere, personally, I'd rather not do that."

The two master-class witches reached a consensus and decided to take a gamble.

The two Japanese witches respected their seniors' opinion, hence it was decided immediately. The four girls summoned the rest of their leviathans.

A body length of ten-odd meters was the default size for "serpents."

They shrank their leviathans down to around one third of their original size. This was a command available to experienced witches. Riding their miniaturized partners, the girls began to move.

The quadrupedal Akuro-Ou and Glinda ran over the sand.

In contrast, Rushalka and Minadzuki flew at low altitude to avoid detection.

It was a journey across a plain of sand. With no particular obstacles, all they needed to do was move in a straight line. Boring and uneventful.

After roughly twenty minutes, the witches finally reached their destination.

"According to what Rushalka saw from the air, these ruins cover quite a wide area. You can put a dozen or so Tokyo Domes in it."

Asya was able to convert the scenery seen by her partner into visual information.

This set of ruins inside Pavel Galad's barrier—

Simply stated, it resembled an "open-pit mine."

With a bowl-shaped depression gouged out of the ground, underground veins of red-brown minerals were exposed. This open pit for mining probably had a diameter reaching two kilometers.

"I-It's huge, Nee-sama!"

"My goodness! How can it be so big!?"

The four witches were standing at the edge of the "bowl-shaped open-pit mine."

The sight was so grand that it would probably be listed as a world heritage site if it existed on Earth. Due to overwhelming emotion, Hazumi and Orihime had their eyes widened, looking down upon these ruins that resembled an open-pit mine.

By visual estimates, the depth exceeded five hundred meters.

Furthermore, there was a building on the bowl's sloping surface.

The building resembled a temple given the style of its roof and tower. The building material seemed to be a kind of stone with a texture similar to obsidian. Using structures from the human world as a comparison, the architectural style most resembled Greek.

In the sky over this open-pit mine, there was a transparent crystal ball hovering midair.

With nothing supporting it underneath or suspended from above, it was floating motionlessly in the air. With a diameter of fourteen or fifteen meters, it was roughly the size of a leviathan.

"That crystal ball looks very suspicious."

"...Oh. Could you all listen to me, everybody?" Orihime suddenly spoke stiffly after Asya gave her comment. "That hole—Something smells ominous about it. Akuro-Ou suddenly tensed up. It feels like this could be the enemy's scent."

" " "....." " "

Akuro-Ou was the nine-tailed fox-wolf leviathan.

A member of the canid family in form, Orihime's partner had the keenest sense of smell among the four leviathans here.

Carrying Orihime, she started to growl softly.

Next—Dragons surged out of the red-brown slopes of the bowl-shaped open-pit mine. Not from a single location but emerging from every corner like bamboo shoots in spring after rain.

A large number of lesser dragons, Raptors, showed up.

Before the girls' eyes, five of them popped out, then seven, followed by another nine—It was endless.

The newborn Raptors did not spring into action right away. Instead, they were spacing out without moving from their spot.

However, if they were to attack at the same time... The witches could not help but gasp at the thought of that.

"Prepare for battle, everyone!"

Asya swiftly jumped down from her partner's back.

In the next instant, Rushalka soared through the sky, gradually increasing in size. Her miniaturized body returned to its full size of ten-odd meters.

The other three girls followed suit, letting the three leviathans expand in size.

The quadrupedal Glinda and Akuro-Ou remained on the ground, standing by near the outskirts of the open-pit mine. Minadzuki stayed motionless in the air overhead, watching over the witches.

"But there are too many of them."

As though trying to encourage herself and her companions, Orihime said, "Raptors can't use runes, so we will manage somehow!"

"Wait, Orihime-san, that's...!"

In a rare moment, Luna Francois showed a frozen expression.

She was staring at the bottom of the pit. A blue spark shot out from there, striking the hovering crystal ball in the air—causing the suspicious sphere to explode.

The fragments scattered, leaving a magical symbol in the air.

Platinum light traced out a rune consisting of three inequality signs, "<" in a series.

"It's the Rune of the Sword!?"

The same instant as Asya exclaimed in shock—

The endless stream of Raptors emerging from the open-pit mine finally increased to around five hundred. Like a brand, the Rune of the Sword appeared on the forehead of each Raptor.

Originally very weak, these lesser dragons began to transform.

Their mouths and snouts merged, turning into what resembled swordfish bills. Sharp at the tip and sword-like in shape.

Dragonslaying swords were equipped on the snouts of the Raptors!

Next, the army of five hundred Raptors flapped their wings at last, intending to fly into the sky to attack their enemies.

One after another, the dragons took flight, aiming to exit the open-pit mine.

The enemy army was like a flock of feeble butterflies, flying unsteadily, but even so, they still made their way to the vast sky outside the pit, gradually raising their altitude. Although their speed had yet to go up, one could tell that they were going to awaken completely sooner or later.

And they were even fitted with dragonslaying swords too.

Asya said to her comrades, "Do we have a way of using the Rune of the Bow?"

"Doesn't seem to work, probably because Harry isn't here. As humans, we're not capable of magic that can pass through this kind of barrier and communicate with him—"

When witches obtained the power of dragonbane, the corresponding rune would appear on the back of their left hand.

Currently, no emblem could be seen. Whether the Bow, the Twin Katana, or the Ring, no dragonslaying rune appeared.

It was the same for Orihime and Hazumi in addition to Asya and Luna Francois.

"W-We clearly can't use the runes, but why can those dragons use the Rune of the Sword—!?"

"This is the enemy's home field, after all. Surely it must be related to the crystal and the spark we just saw... We'll have to look into it later."

Ignoring the panicking Hazumi, Luna shouted, "Glinda, pin them to the ground! Gravity Pressure!"

The three-headed lion leviathan invoked pseudo-divinity.

In the next instant, the more than five hundred Raptors that were flying unsteadily, almost about to fly beyond the open-pit mine, fell down swiftly, crashing hard into the pit's sloping surface.

Glinda had used her Gravity attribute to pull them down by force.

Drawing the Raptors downward from the sky, she smashed them into the ground.

The reason was quite simple, but targeting every single one of these five hundred Raptors and achieving this feat effortlessly was only possible due to the skills of the master-class witch Luna Francois.

"Luna-san, you're so amazing!"

"B-But those dragons still look energetic...!"

Orihime praised in admiration but Hazumi voiced her worries.

Immobilized inside the pit by gravity, the five hundred Raptors were struggling, flapping their wings and thrashing their limbs, but could not even lift their bodies up from the ground. However, it was true that their movements were strong and forceful with plenty of vitality.

The force of the fall evidently did not inflict much damage to the overly resilient Raptors.

This was most likely the blessing of the Rune of the Sword. Creatures granted the power of dragonbane would become extremely durable. Haruga Haruomi had experienced it firsthand himself, but—

"Although I don't know how long I can keep them restrained without Harry's help, I will pin them down for as long as possible. I leave the rest to you!"

Luna Francois called out loudly.

In the process of using pseudo-divinity, Glinda the three-headed lion had her limbs extended, stomping the ground at full force, roaring fiercely.

ROOOOOOOOOOOOOAAAAAAAAR!

Glinda's entire body was releasing magical power.

This was to reinforce the potency of the pseudo-divinity imprisoning the Raptors inside the pit. Among the five hundred Raptors, ten-odd of them struggled desperately, broke free, and were about to take flight again.

However, the gravity crushing the dragons to the ground increased again.

Even the Raptors about to fly crashed with a thud, their chins and upper torsos smashed against the sand, unable to move.

Orihime was the first to take action next.

"In that case... Akuro-Ou!"

The nine-tailed fox-wolf leviathan—Akuro-Ou.

Orihime's partner used the pseudo-divinity of Fire, discharging vortexes of flame from the tips of her nine tails, immolating the Raptors that were trapped inside the pit!

This attack succeeded in burning around fifty of them to ash.

The strong Raptors were reaching the limit of their stamina too.

"Minadzuki will help out too!"

The emerald serpentine dragon leviathan—Minadzuki—opened her mouth, firing a white heat beam at the Raptors.

Seven Raptors perished at the same time. Having her partner refrain from using pseudo-divinity was evidence of Shiasaka Hazumi's growth as a witch.

Among them, Minadzuki was the only one capable of relying on "goddess power" to use healing magic.

Hazumi had learned how to decide the timing of pseudo-divinity, so as to be ready when her comrades were injured. In past battles, before she gained mastery in the realm of magic, she had never thought this far ahead.

"Rushalka, begin the attack. One hit one kill."

Asya issued orders calmly and mercilessly.

Currently, Glinda's pseudo-divinity was keeping every Raptor pinned to the ground.

To make the best of this opportunity, Rushalka descended swiftly from the air then ascended rapidly, repeating this over a dozen times. Using her hind legs to grab the heads of the immobilized Raptors, she twisted and broke their necks, causing fatal injuries.

However, the Raptors continued to struggle, trying to break free of their restraints.

Luna Francois and Glinda's magical power and concentration were not limitless. The shackles of gravity began to weaken. The number of Raptors dragging these shackles while taking flight unsteadily increased one by one.

The situation was getting more dangerous, but Asya remained calm and composed.

She issued orders one after another. "Rushalka, enter dogfighting range. Blitz them."

Seeing Raptors flying unsteadily, Rushalka approached swiftly.

Using her body, she knocked them away, crushing the startled enemies' heads with her jaws, instantly rendering her enemies dead or incapacitated.

However, the restraints of gravity control were gradually weakening while Rushalka continued to fight.

More and more Raptors recovered their agility, looking so menacing that their prior sluggishness seemed like a lie. Charging at Rushalka, they tried to stab her with their sword-like bills.

Unfortunately for them, the pair of Shootdown Aces remained calm and merciless.

"Rushalka, avoid head-on confrontations and prioritize attacking from behind."

"Rushalka, I allow you to use your breath, but only in emergencies."

"Rushalka, prepare to attack with your horn."

Every time the situation changed, Asya instantly issued commands.

Moving spectacularly, Rushalka circled behind the backs of Raptors, biting her prey's necks instead of attacking with her breath, then stabbed them

using the horn on her forehead. Repeating this almost like a flow process, she kept slaughtering the Raptors.

Asya the seasoned warrior and her partner Rushalka.

In fact, the blue wyvern did not wait to listen until the final word in Asya's orders. The moment the silver-haired witch called her name, Rushalka would perform the action required by her partner.

Linked in mind and soul. As soon as Asya thought, her intent would reach her partner.

For the Shootdown Ace partnership renowned as Europe's strongest, words were merely an auxiliary means of communications.

Rushalka accurately put into action what the experienced Asya pictured in her mind.

Indeed. One could not rule out the possibility of Pavel Galad sending reinforcements.

The use of pseudo-divinity, with its limited usage count, had to be minimized, but complete abstinence would not be wise either.

"Asya, I'm planning to cast gravity on them again. Can I trouble you to guard Glinda while I am charging up?"

"Got it!"

Luna made her request just before the restraining gravity ran out.

Most of the Raptors had regained their freedom and were flying out of the pit again to attack the four "serpents."

It was currently the most chaotic moment of the battle.

The enemies were down to three hundred or so. A few dozen of them were wandering on the ground near the brave Glinda, about to attack her with the swords on their snouts...

Rushalka flew right into the middle of those Raptors.

With wings outspread, she stopped in the air. Asya swiftly issued orders.

"Rushalka, while flying over to take the position directly above Glinda, use pseudo-divinity and exterminate them. Frost Breath!"

Frost Breath was a killer move combining pseudo-divinity of Water with a breath attack.

Rushalka discharged white breath mixed with shards of ice and snow.

Not just in front but behind and to the side as well, the whole area surrounding the blue wyvern was turned into an enchanted territory.

When Raptors inhaled the cold air, their hearts—or rather, their heartmetals—stopped.

They were frozen to death. In the next instant, the Raptors' physical bodies immediately crumbled into dust like ice sculptures that had been smashed by a hammer...

In the end, out of the thirty-eight Raptors, thirty-six were killed instantly.

Only two Raptors that happened to be on the edge of the freezing death territory survived due to good luck without suffering much apparent damage.

They flapped their wings to dissipate the cold air and flew into the sky again to attack.

At that moment, Asya's expression changed in alarm.

"...Eh?"

Instinct had told her that her attack would crush all targets in front of her without exception.

However, her sense of judgment had been off. She failed to take care of two Raptors.

One surviving Raptor used a headbutt on Rushalka, sinking the sword on its snout deeply into her left shoulder, digging in forcefully.

Then it shook its head up and down hard.

Rushalka's wing—the wing sprouting from the left shoulder in place of an arm—was amputated at its root.

Next moment, Asya was struck by an illusory feeling... She felt like her own left arm had been chopped off.

"Ah."

Even though it was an illusion, she still felt a sharp pain from the base of her left shoulder.

The Raptor was Pavel Galad's minion and was empowered by the Rune of the Sword. When damage was inflicted to a leviathan by a dragonslaying rune, the pain would transmit to the partner too.

Losing one wing while in the sky, Rushalka was severely injured.

Kyuahhhhhhhhhhhhh!

"Owwwwwww!"

Rushalka screamed in pain and began to fall.

Asya fell upon her knees in pain, pressing her head against the ground. Her left shoulder had lost all feeling, evidently from excessive pain. Her consciousness was fading too.

As for the other surviving Raptor, it flew over Glinda, stabbing the lion leviathan deeply in the back using its snout sword the moment it was directly overhead.

"Kyahhhh!"

This time it was Luna Francois' turn to scream. She fainted.

Like Asya, she experienced her partner's pain. Glinda also seemed to be grievously injured, collapsing on the side.

"L-Luna-san!?"

"Are you okay, Asya-san!? Hang in there!" Hazumi cried out.

Orihime was speechless too.

However, the elder Japanese witch immediately called Akuro-Ou to her side.

This was to protect the heavily injured Rushalka and Glinda, who were right beside them, and Minadzuki, who was relatively close to the four witches.

The remaining Raptors immediately converged upon them.

The circled slowly, biding their time to launch a heavy assault. Akuro-Ou and Minadzuki growled to keep them at bay.

"Looks like we are in for a last stand."

Luna Francois was unconscious on the ground. Asya was groaning, holding her left shoulder.

Orihime glanced at the two senior witches and remarked softly. Although Hazumi walked over to Orihime's side with a determined look, there was no hiding the fear and worry on her face.

"Haruga-kun, it looks like we are facing a critical moment..."

Calling to the young man who was not by her side, she clenched her left hand.

The Rune of the Bow. The Rune of the Twin Katana. Normally speaking, the dragonslaying symbols would appear here on her hand. This time, the girls were deprived of aid from the power of dragonbane—

Part 4

The elite dragon Pavel Galad and the Rune of the Sword.

Naturally, Hal regarded him as a formidable foe.

However, no matter what, he was probably nowhere as powerful as Red Hannibal or Princess Yukikaze—

Perhaps this kind of optimistic thinking existed vaguely in Hal's mind. As though mocking Hal for his naivete, the dragon hero used unusual moves, one after another, which were surprising to Hal—or perhaps, more potent than he imagined.

No witches by his side. Using mysterious flames to bolster the Rune of the Sword. Summoning a large quantity of golems.

"He's totally coming at me, pulling out all stops..."

Still in spirit form, Hal watched the battle situation, muttering to himself.

Currently, the battlefield was in the sky over Tokyo New Town. Two dragons—the Crimson Queen and Pavel Galad—were flying back and forth across New Town in an aerial battle.

Problems, it was still not a one-on-one battle.

"I don't have a single ally here!"

Pavel Galad had used alchemy magic to create a whole bunch of golems.

Golems born from concrete and the remains of steel-framed structures, certainly abundant in manpower.

There were winged lizards resembling Raptors, serpents, and giant lizards without wings.

Praying mantises with sword-shaped forelimbs, stag beetles with swords for horns, swordfish whose bills were as long and sharp as swords, flying fish with sharp blades for wings and could serve as swords.

Also sharks, killer whales, crocodiles, and salamanders.

Plesiosaurs, pteranodons, ammonites, trilobites...

All of them were golems that had been born before Hal's eyes earlier. Reptiles, insects, fish, etc. There were more than two hundred of them in this airspace alone.

Every one of them was flying freely in the sky with the Rune of the Sword appearing on their foreheads.

Each golem was empowered by the rune, turning their swords into "dragslaying swords." Even though Hal did not think he would be careless, it would be best to avoid being hit continuously by dragslaying attacks. However, that was not possible.

Using the advantage of numbers, the golems swarmed in from all directions.

"Aiming at them one at a time is too slow..."

Full burst. Hal ordered the queen to use a technique of assured annihilation.

"Queen, take them out in one go!"

The Crimson Queen raised the dragonslaying bow and casually shot it into the sky.

Fired directly upwards, the arrow of light exploded like fireworks, producing a shower of roughly a thousand lights falling to the ground.

Mere contact caused golems to vaporize with a resounding sizzle.

In the end, Pavel Galad's creations, more than two hundred of them, were eliminated in an instant, returning the queen's surroundings to silence.

"Find that Galad. Who knows where he's hiding?"

The silver dragon was nowhere in sight.

Receiving orders, the Crimson Queen flew downstream of the Sumida River.

For better or worse, now that Hal had turned into a spiritual entity hovering in the air, tagging along was relatively effortless. Following the queen, he was just about to use investigative magic when—

"They finally gathered here, huh..."

A large number of enemies were flying from the Arakawa—the eastern part of Tokyo New Town.

Golems had been born from debris of concrete and steel again. Resembling Raptors, serpents, lizards, mantises, stag beetles, swordfish, flying fish... All shapes and forms as earlier. Their foreheads showed the mark of the Rune of the Sword.

This time, the golem army numbered roughly three hundred.

"What's the situation in other places?"

Earlier, Hal had shot the magic symbol of the Eye into the sky over Tokyo. He closed his eyes and ordered the magic eye to show him an overhead view of Tokyo's entirety.

"I knew it..."

Seeing the scenery revealed to him, Hal groaned.

Pavel Galad had picked the former Shuto Expressway as his "mountain of raw materials." This highway network circulated in a giant oval shape in Tokyo New Town, allowing one to drive in a continuous circuit.

Explosions had occurred at sixty or seventy locations on the highway, becoming sources for the monster armies.

As a result, a casual count showed over a thousand golems flying unchecked in the sky over New Town as though it were their territory.

Furthermore, all of them were converging upon Hal's position at Mukaishima—

"Whatever, I've already resigned myself."

Hal sighed.

Pavel Galad's trap covered quite a broad area, probably calculated to hunt down Hal no matter where he fled and corner him. Even if he tried to jump through space using teleportation magic, interference magic would probably stop him.

In other words, he was going to encounter large numbers of golems no matter where he went.

Not like he could use a technique of assured annihilation to take care of things every time.

That would greatly deplete Hal's stamina and mental focus. Extremely draining.

Previously, he always had witches and leviathans to help share the burden, but this time, he was all alone and must handle things himself—

"Increase elevation first. Leave the ground!"

The Crimson Queen and Hal's spiritual form began to ascend.

Their altitude kept increasing. 150m, 200m, 250m above ground—By the time he reached a height where he could overlook New Town's streets as though viewing from the Tokyo Tower in the past, Hal was finally able to see the movements of the golem armies with his naked eye.

Coming from east, west, south, and north.

Over a thousand golems of various shapes and forms were flying in from all directions, trying to surround the Crimson Queen.

"Fire!"

Hal ordered the queen to launch the offensive first.

The queen began to fire in succession. Repeatedly, the dragonslaying bow shot arrows of light, shooting down Pavel Galad's minions one after another.

But the enemy also closed in during this attack.

Just as both sides got close enough for close quarters combat, Hal suddenly felt a pain in his heart.

"Uwah!?"

Originally firing, the Crimson Queen froze in the air.

A flying fish golem was roaming nearby. Every time it brushed past, it would attempt to slice the queen using its wings.

The flying fish's wings were simultaneously sharp blades, dragonslaying swords.

Naturally, a mere minion's slices would not be able to breach the queen's barrier. However, attacks blocked by imperishable protection would inflict minor damage to Hal's heart, i.e. heartmetal—

Incidentally, this was only a prelude to a heavy offensive.

A mantis, a Raptor, a serpent—Three golems of such types approached swiftly, using the "swords" fitted on their bodies to slash the queen!

"Gah...!"

The queen blocked all attacks using imperishable protection, but it caused waves of pain to Hal's heart.

Furthermore, the attacking golems flew away after one strike without engaging continuously with the queen in the air, but new arrivals kept attacking.

Up, down, left, right, front, back, all directions.

Raptors, serpents, lizards, stag beetles, swordfish... All sorts.

The Crimson Queen immediately breathed fire, burning to death the golems approaching from the front. This was a chance to use the sun-shooting—No.

It was still too soon. Hal changed his mind and ordered the queen, "Switch weapons! Use the Rune of the Twin Katana!"

Despite his spiritual form, the dragonslaying rune still appeared clearly on the palm of Hal's right hand.

Previously, it had been "the tilted half-moon," a pictograph representing the bow, but now it changed into "a cross shape" to represent a pair of katana.

The queen's weapons also transformed from bow and arrows to two swords, one big and one small.

Switching from a shooting battle to close quarters combat, the Crimson Queen equipped the larger sword in the right hand and the smaller sword in the left, slicing apart the golem in front and shoving it down.

At the same time, the queen used her tail as a whip, knocking away a golem approaching from behind.

As for enemies from below, she used her hind legs to kick them away, following up with fire breath of course. Using more than just the two swords wielded in her left and right, the queen used her entire body as a weapon, ready to take on incoming enemies.

In addition, there was imperishable protection.

Even though the golems attacked with all their might, all they accomplished was inflicting minor twitching pain to Hal's heart. In contrast, the Crimson

Queen's effortless yet powerful strikes were able to deliver instant death to her prey. It was like moths drawn to a flame.

An impregnable stance as befitting a dragon king's body.

Relying on numerical superiority, the golems attacked endlessly. However, all the Crimson Queen needed to do was block the enemies' suicidal tactics calmly and confidently then counterattack as necessary.

"If only I could wait for victory like in those Whatever Musou games."

But of course, reality was never so ideal.

Hal's spirit muttered to himself while imagining a certain action. Next, the Crimson Queen acted according to the image in his mind. Crossing the swords held in her left and right, she formed a "x" shape.

BOOOOOOM!

CLAAAANG!

Instantly, a thunderous crash resounded in all directions.

Initially, it was a sonic boom produced from breaking the sound barrier. This was followed by the noise from a violent crash of metal.

Using the crossed pair of swords, the queen blocked a slash from Pavel Galad.

"Hohohoho. It seems that you have intention of allowing me to win so easily!"

"You took the words out of my mouth!"

Galad and the dragonslaying sword had appeared instantaneously.

Blocked by the crossed blades, the dragonslaying sword was burning with blue-white flames. Sensing intense magical power from those flames, Hal stared at the fearsome magic swordsman.

Runes of Ruruk Soun, High-Speed Flight—

It allowed Pavel Galad to reach a speed of Mach 1.2 or so.

Seeing Hal and the queen losing concentration, he had suddenly closed in with supersonic flight to deliver a deadly strike of the sword. Hal only noticed it thanks to the Eye in the sky.

In addition to a wide visual range, the Eye was even able to capture supersonic speed.

Thanks to that, the queen just managed to draw with him. Had Hal not set up the magic eye ahead of time, defending against a sword flying at supersonic speed would have been impossible.

It was definitely a close call. Furthermore, the clash brought an unexpected windfall.

"Your sword is almost equal in power to my twin katana... After a long absence, you've added some weird decoration too."

The dragonslaying sword in front of the Crimson Queen was burning with blue-white flames.



Looking at it from up close, Hal nodded vigorously. Rather than deducing through logic, a mage's instinct told him the answer.

This—the fire controlled by Galad—Hal had seen it before!

Apart from that, there was another discovery worth celebrating.

"The fire is starting to die down. Are you sure that's okay?"

Just as Hal pointed out, the fire on the dragonslaying sword was gradually weakening.

In the next instant, the twin katana and the sword were no longer in stalemate. Cracks appeared on the dragonslaying sword pushing against the cross of steel—the swords wielded in the Crimson Queen's hands, one big and one small.

"Hmm!?"

Pavel Galad panicked a little.

The cracks grew, spreading all over the blade.

Proportional to the blaze of blue-white flames, the magical power on the dragonslaying sword also gradually decreased. In contrast, the queen's twin blades still possessed dragon king-class magical power.

The gap in magical power was reflected in strength and durability. The battle was shifting in the favor of the twin katana...!

"My hidden stash of treasure!" Galad suddenly shouted.

The flames on the dragonslaying sword instantly recovered their original intensity with a "boom!" The cracks on the blade also vanished without a trace.

Once again, the magical power of the sword rose to equal that of the twin katana.

Yesterday, President M had given a warning, could it mean that—Suddenly inspired, Hal asked Galad, "These flames granting power to a dragonslaying rune... *Is it actually something I already know?*"

"Oh? You realized it? Clever as always," Pavel Galad replied, impressed. "To be honest, I did not expect you to notice so soon."

"I don't claim any credit. I was simply lucky to run into someone who gave me advice. Without her, I probably wouldn't have figured it out."

"No need to be modest. Luck is part of a warrior's aptitude."

"Cut that nonsense out. I'm not some kind of warrior!"

Hal instantly retorted, but the silver dragon was no longer in front of him.

He suddenly flew away, swiftly leaving the Crimson Queen.

It was imperative to chase him. However, before Hal could do that—The enemy army counterattacked. The frightening number of golems attacked the queen again.

"Damn it...!"

Wave after wave, golems of all sorts attacked.

Hal deployed imperishable protection in a wide area, defending all attacks regardless which direction the enemies attacked from.

The pearly barrier surrounded the Crimson Queen.

Golems in the shape of Raptors, pteranodons, swordfish, wasps, boars, sharks, killer whales, etc, approached the pearly light and slashed with their swords—

No matter how relentless the offensive, the swords of mere minions could not threaten imperishable protection.

Backed by secure protection, the queen slowly exhaled fiery breath, striking back using the greater sword and the kodachi in her hands, casually dispatching the golems within reach.

But amidst all that, one Raptor-shaped golem charged the queen.

Noticing the golem's unusual magical power, Hal swiftly used Ruruk Soun magic of Dispel.

"Queen, be careful!"

Just as he suspected, the Raptor-shaped golem began to slowly transformed after being hit by Dispel, turning into Pavel Galad with the dragonslaying sword in his hand. He had disguised himself using transformation magic.

"Hahahahaha, you found me again!"

CLAAAAAAANG!

The dragonslaying sword with blue flames and the twin katana clashed intensely again for the second time today.

The queen held the pair of swords in a cross, blocking the longsword's downward swing. Seeing that the surprise attack failed, Pavel Galad simply flew away from the queen at high speed.

Once again, Hal missed the chance to deliver a follow-up attack.

This was because as soon as Galad left as the leader of the army, the golems would start attacking the queen again.

"Is he gonna stick to hit-and-run the whole time today...?"

Hal understood.

Using the mass produced golem subordinates as diversions to occupy the enemy, making full use of them, while Pavel Galad himself mustered all his power and wit to slice the queen in half.

Such tactics were hardly fair and square and did not seem to belong to a hot-blooded opponent at all.

Hal knew. In terms of pure power—He and the queen surpassed Galad by far.

Precisely because of that, Galad had used so many tricks to compensate for the gap. Separating Hal from the witches, using massive resources to pin down the enemy, using *those flames* to strengthen the dragonslaying sword.

All this was for the sake of defeating Haruga Haruomi and his powers of dragonbane.

To defeat such an enemy—Naturally, maximum offensive power was needed.

The bow and the technique of assured annihilation, the sun-shooting divine bow. This time, he must use a full-powered attack to achieve victory and avoid repeating the same mistake as yesterday.

"I will fire the sun-shooting divine bow at the sky, to exterminate the sun," Hal recited the incantation softly.

Enemies were all around. Gathered here, the number of golems reached several thousand. They were all attacking the Crimson Queen and Pavel Galad was lurking somewhere.

Surrounded by enemies, the queen finally turned her weapon into the crimson divine bow and nocked an arrow of light on the bowstring.

Then she fired. Up towards the sky.

The arrow of light exploded at a height of a thousand meters above ground, turning into a shower of thousands of lights...

It was similar to the full burst attack earlier.

But this time, the bullets were not being fired randomly.

Every light had to meet its mark. This was sniping. A technique of assured annihilation, *aimed* at the thousands of golems in Tokyo New Town.

"Please!"

Hal drew out even more magical power from his heart, i.e. his heartmetal.

Magical power was sent to every corner of the queen's gigantic body like blood, even added to the thousands of shining lights shot out from the bow.

Currently, the Crimson Queen was Hal's physical body.

Every arrow shot from the dragonslaying bow could even be considered Hal's avatar.

Pursue. Pursue! Pursue. Pursue. Pursue. Pursue. Pursue!

The technique of assured annihilation, the sun-shooting divine bow, had fired thousands of lights.

Every light was a magical projectile of guaranteed death for exterminating enemies.

The instant a golem was pierced in the head or the heart by light, its entire body erupted in a fiery blaze.

The thousands of magical creatures created from enchanted steel and concrete all exploded amidst immolation, no exceptions. Numerous remains were scattered all over New Town.

Letting not even a single bullet go to waste, the Crimson Queen had enacted this miracle.

The whole process had taken ten-odd seconds. This massacre would have been a fitting feat for the past dragon queen who prided in her divine archery skills.

"Where did that Galad run off to?"

Hal's voice was emitted from the Crimson Queen—the dragon jaws.

After firing the divine bow, the queen's physical body and Hal's spiritual form began to meld together.

When using a top-class technique of assured annihilation to perform this task, the magical power in the heart, i.e heartmetal, belonging to Hal and the queen had risen to critical point, bringing the spirit and the body to virtually complete synchronization. Hence, the two merging into one was a result that could not be more natural.

"Enemy Detection..."

Hal, i.e the Crimson Queen, muttered quietly.

Although it was a small spell frequently used in the human world, Enemy Detection was quite useful. This time, Hal could immediately sense all enemies flying within three kilometers.

After that, all he needed to do was confirm using the Eye in the sky.

"I see."

The magic eye informed him that the enemy had used Invisibility to conceal his entire body.

However, the Eye created by the wisdom of Ruruk Soun had seen through it at a glance. A silver dragon, carrying a blazing longsword in his hand.

"The final blow..."

Hal, i.e the Crimson Queen, spoke mechanically in monotone.

He nocked an arrow of light onto the crimson divine bow, preparing to unleash a technique of assured annihilation. This time, Hal selected the bird-downing divine bow.

This was a mystic technique for piercing a prey's vital with one arrow, taking its life.

"We've known each other for a while now, but it's time to end things."

Hal muttered in a flat voice of indifference.

However, certain dark emotions were occupying his heart.

The sense of triumph from being able to kill the strongest prey. The sense of conquest from being able to personally crush such a fierce and powerful creature. This was an expression of the hunting instinct dormant deep in his

soul, an impulse stemming from killing instinct, as well as the awakening of an instinct for strife.

Hal, i.e. the Crimson Queen, finally shot the arrow of light.

"Go."

With the solemnity of someone closest to reaching the dragon king throne, he issued a brief yet powerful command.

During its launch, the arrow of light instantly increased five fold in length and girth, turning into what could be considered a spear of light, streaking across the sky.

0.2 seconds later, the arrow of light easily pierced the chest of the invisible Pavel Galad.

Thus the silver dragon of the sword became enveloped in crimson flames. A great explosion. A glorious demise in the air without leaving any flesh or scales behind—

Dark joy surged in Hal's heart. In the next instant, Hal, i.e. the Crimson Queen, jumped in surprise.

He immediately spread his wings and backed away as fast as he could, but it was too late. Pavel Galad suddenly appeared in front of him, swinging the dragonslaying sword down—Of course, Hal failed to dodge this deadly strike of the sword. Neither could he deploy imperishable protection in time to defend.

The blade, capable of exterminating even dragons, stabbed Hal, i.e. the Crimson Queen, cleanly in the chest.

The wound was deep enough to reach the heartmetal, or the heart organ of humans.

"How uncharacteristic of you..." said Pavel Galad, the formidable foe who had stabbed using the dragonslaying sword.

"Following the instincts of warriors and hunters to execute a vicious blow is fearsome indeed... But that belongs to the ways of dragonkind. The Haruga Haruomi I know is not like that."

Didn't I defeat you?—No no no.

It was a very simple trap. Galad simply kept a golem in reserve then used magic to turn it into his decoy. Then all he needed to do was ambush Hal, i.e. the Crimson Queen, during his intoxicating moment of triumph to bring about a quick conclusion...

Perhaps due to the sword wound, "Haruga Haruomi's way of thinking" was gradually recovering.

But it was a bit too late.

Pavel Galad said proudly, "What a shame. To be devoured by a dragon's soul at the final moment, thus losing your sense of self. Since you have gotten so close to the secrets of Ruruk Soun, this would be hardly unexpected—"

I see, so that's what it feels like inside a dragon's brain?

Hal wanted to sustain that state longer for further research.

However, he did not want to repeat the same mistake. Furthermore, he was evidently out of time and energy... How did this happen!?

"Let me offer you a parting gift. Your minions—the female humans known as 'witches' are currently facing a hopeless situation. I will see to it that everyone sets off for the afterlife. Rest assured, you will not be traveling alone."

The same as always, Galad was very polite in strange ways.

Although Hal wanted to retort "like hell anyone could feel assured after hearing of something like this!", he was unable to make even a sound.

Unaware of these thoughts of Hal, Pavel Galad drew out the sword from the queen's gigantic body.

The Crimson Queen no longer had the strength to fly and started to fall, crashing directly towards the streets somewhere in Tokyo New Town.

While Hal's consciousness was gradually fading, the faces of the witches surfaced in his mind.

Shirasaka Hazumi, Luna Francois, Juujouji Orihime, and Asya. He began to focus his mind, trying to reach the witches and their partners, the leviathans, telepathically—

Of course, it was too late.

Even so, Hal, i.e. the Crimson Queen, still clenched his right hand forcibly.

He grabbed something. This sensation felt nostalgic. Soft yet elastic, adhering firmly to his hand. One of them felt small and containable in one hand while the other surrounded Hal's hand instead.

"Asya... Juujouji..."

He called out softly to the young maidens closest to him.

I must hurry and reunite with them. Hurry. Hurry. Hurry... His thoughts grew more and more dull. So did the pain from his chest.

Soon after, Hal could not think at all, finally losing consciousness.

Chapter 4 - Lost Witches

Part 1

The equilateral triangular prism of pure black, towering at over a thousand meters, stood in the Old Tokyo Concession at the former district of Ginza.

People called this type of object a "Monolith." However, dragonkind simply called it a "wedge."

Of course, humans of Earth were unaware of this difference.

The only exceptions were probably Haruga Haruomi, who had frequent contact with dragons—and one other person.

That man was named Sophocles.

A tall handsome man in the prime of life with very mature airs.

His complexion was too dark for a Caucasian, his facial features too deep-set for an oriental, no negroid characteristics. Let alone his real identity, even his race was indeterminate.

Sophocles was standing on the top of the Monolith.

Again, he was dressed in a black suit today, always showing up in front of others in this attire.

"Princess, your mood seems... not too great."

"Say no more. I cannot believe that Haruomi dared to lose before our duel... Defeated by the likes of that silver dragon. What a disgrace!"

The eccentric dressed in black inquired why Princess Yukikaze was unhappy.

This was a height over a thousand meters from the ground. Strong gusts of wind were blowing across the top without any hindrances.

In spite of that, the princess and Sophocles were conversing normally.

"The Road to Kingship, a game whose participants are Tyrannoi aiming for the position of dragon king... Shouldn't this victory be seen as a brilliant comeback executed by the latecomer Pavel Galad? Such open-mindedness is only fitting for a dragon king."

"I, Yukikaze, could not care less."

Princess Yukikaze's tone was clearly sulking.

Acting in this manner when her appearance was that of a fourteen or fifteen year old made her seem very childish. In contrast, Sophocles was talking to her with a calm and respectful attitude the whole time.

"Then why did you allow that dragon to have a match against the young man?"

"Do you even need to ask? This was to tell Haruomi that he is not worthy of dueling me, Yukikaze, if he were unable to overcome a trial of that level."

"Meaning you had no intention of fighting Pavel Galad from the very start?"

"Not necessarily. However, to this day, I, Yukikaze, have confronted similar opponents countless times. It has long become stale and boring. In that case, I prefer to fight Haruomi. He—"

Princess Yukikaze was outlandish, seeking not just simple victory or life and death but also pleasure on the battlefield.

Due to this type of personality, she asserted firmly, "He is far more interesting than others and pleasing to me."

"But that young man lost."

Sophocles' tone was gloomy.

"Just as you say, princess... He is not even worthy of competing against current royalty, much less ascending to the position of dragon king. Your discerning eye has proven this."

"Hmph."

Even when praised, Princess Yukikaze still turned her head away with displeasure like a sulking child.

She was the youngest dragon king. Very youthful in mind as well as appearance—Or rather, young. Full of childishness.

Preciesely because of that, her mood would not improve simply because a suspicious human being offered her a few words of praise.

However, it was not like she would sulk nonstop.

"Fine. I, Yukikaze, shall reward that silver dragon a little as befits the victor. I shall personally send him to the afterlife."

"Take care."

"Your name is Sophocles, isn't it? What are your plans?"

"I—There is a matter that intrigues me."

If Princess Yukikaze was a conqueror and warrior, then Sophocles was the game master who saw through everything from a god's eye view. Out of a game master's sense of responsibility, he said calmly, "Pavel Galad gained the advantage by carefully setting up the combat arena. However, the young man's allies—those priestesses—have yet to exit the stage."

"Now that you mention it, there were always a few humans hanging by Haruomi's side."

"Those girls are fairly resourceful. Perhaps they may become the key to victory—The second key."

"...Oh?"

Noticing Sophocles' intent, Princess Yukikaze finally smiled.

It was a radiant smile exuding pride and ambition. It was also evidence that the beautiful maiden, reminiscent of a snow fairy, had switched to a seasoned warrior's countenance.

"In other words, you believe there could be further twists and developments."

"Who knows? Mere speculation on my part. I cannot make any guarantees to you about whether the situation would unfold in this way unless I bear witness with my own eyes."

"Hahahaha. In that case, make haste and be on your way. Use your eyes properly to watch clearly!" Recovering her former vitality, Princess Yukikaze commanded gallantly.

"In the meantime, I, Yukikaze, shall play with Pavel Galad a little while waiting for your good news. Off I go to enter the fray. Heaven and earth shall bear witness—Even with the Rune of the Sword in his possession, the dragonslaying arrow cannot be stopped!"

Part 2

Inside the barrier created by Pavel Galad...

A great battle was taking place the mysterious ruins resembling an open-pit mine. Four witches and four leviathans were cornered.

A huge number of Raptors had them heavily surrounded.

The initial pack of more than five hundred dragons were finally reduced to three hundred or so.

However, the girls were still severely outnumbered.

Furthermore, the aces Asya and Luna Francois were incapacitated. They lacked the power of dragonbane on their side yet the enemy possessed the Rune of the Sword.

No chance of victory at all.

Even so, Juujouji Orihime still stood up straight and glared at the Raptors flying freely in the sky, equipped with the dragonslaying sword.

The enemy had yet to launch an offensive, because Akuro-Ou and Minadzuki were growling to keep them at bay.

Kuohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Rahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Akuro-Ou kept her head and upper torso low while raising her rear in a threatening pose. The nine tails were standing on end, completely extended, like an open fan.

On the other hand, Minadzuki was hovering closer to the witches.

Instead of intentionally putting on a ferocious appearance, the emerald serpentine dragon growled, staring aloofly at the enemies in the air.

Looking at her injured companions, Minadzuki's gentle partner showed worry.

"Everybody..." Hazumi said sadly.

Glinda had a massive wound on her back while Rushalka had her left wing completely amputated. Luna had fainted and looked unconscious. Sprawled on the ground in pain, Asya was groaning.

All Hazumi had to do was ask Minadzuki and she would be able to use the power of healing to cure everyone.

But doing so would present an opening to the enemy. The instant Minadzuki stopped keeping them at bay, would the Raptors in the air attack at the same time?

This premonition gave pause to Hazumi. It was probably not paranoia on her part.

Then at that moment, the witches jumped in surprise.

The one most dear to them was thinking of them, worrying about their safety—For some reason, they knew with certainty.

"...Eh? Senpai?"

"It's Haruga-kun!?"

The feeling just now only lasted a brief instant. Hazumi and Orihime were stunned.

Alone on the Earth's surface, stuck in a crisis—He had transmitted his thoughts through a brief connection. In his fight against a fellow Tyrannos, he had been stabbed by the dragonslaying sword in the end. With his

fading consciousness, Haruga Haruomi recalled his companions and transmitted his thoughts...

"Oh no! At this rate, Senpai will—"

"Then no one can go save him? Oh my goodness...!"

Thinking of the worst outcome, the two girls were very shocked.

Such a reaction was very normal for Hazumi and Orihime who had grown up in Japan.

Indeed. They were the exemplars of kindhearted girls and wholesome humans. Hence, Anastasya Rubashvili was highly unusual to think of such things.

That was the way things were. The difference between her and the Japanese witches was as great as night and day to begin with.

"What the heck..."

The phantom pain felt as though her left arm had been severed whole.

While groaning because of this unbearable pain, Asya figured things out at the same time. In a powerless voice as though on her last breath, she murmured, "The link between our minds with Haruomi's... did not disappear—It's just hard to confirm its presence because we're on a different world line..."

However, thanks to Haruomi's intense worry for the witches' safety, their minds had connected for an instant.

In other words, this spiritual link could be created through artificial means. In abject agony, Asya was certain of this.

It was apparently thanks to that mysterious crystal ball that the enemy was able to use the Rune of the Sword—

Such methods were unorthodox.

However, if Europe's strongest Shootdown Ace and her companions were doing it, her senses and magical power as a witch were sufficient. *Through my own strength, I must reproduce the link with Haruomi!*

The pain had caused Asya's recent pursuit of "increased feminine prowess" to vanish from her mind completely.

Probably because of that, at this very moment, Asya began to perform a magic technique of extremely challenging difficulty, as a "complete witch" devoid of all impurities.

"O ancient... divine seal of purity. Once again, grant me and Rushalka power."

She petitioned the pentagram worshiped by witches and leviathans.

It was not a prayer. Rather, she was "extracting" power from that magical emblem.

Naturally gifted, Asya had been certified as a master-class witch at an early age, hence, her understanding of magic was founded upon inborn instinctive sensing rather than knowledge.

So-called magic was not a method where one prayed to others, hoping for someone else to make your wish come true.

Suppose magical power existed here. Powerful magic that could demolish an entire city if one were to mistime one's breathing by a fraction of a second—

Using the spellcaster's sensitivity and knowledge to subjugate such power and make it obey.

That was magic.

Failure never crossed her mind. Even if she actually failed, she would not care either. Even if it meant that a city would be blown away, there was no helping it. She would simply succeed next time.

Only by attaining a realm of such an extent could one achieve *Ars Magna*, epic magic.

Prayer, altruism, or some such should be left to any random religion. Arrogant recklessness, certainty of one's success, self-centeredness, only those with their soul tainted by darkness and fiendish qualities could attain the same realm as exemplified by Asya and others!

"...Gah!"

Sprawling, Asya barely managed to lift her upper torso.

Her left shoulder was in excruciating pain. In fact, it was impossible for her to move normally in this state. But by this juncture, even pain itself had turned into an important factor to increase concentration instead.

She focused her mind to forget her body's pain, then felt it.

On her chest—the left breast, closest to the source of magical power's creation, a witch's heart. Something was fondling her small breasts, in the same manner as how Haruomi had done so in the past.

"Rushalka, use the Rune of the Bow."

Almost about to faint from pain, Asya smiled confidently.

The "tilted half-moon," the emblem of the Rune of the Bow, appeared on the back of her left hand.

Traversing worlds, a spiritual link between her and Haruomi had been reconstructed. The brief instant earlier had told Asya the key principle to this magic. Simply stated, all that was required was recreating "the same feeling as from that time." Even though it was a difficult undertaking, Asya succeeded in her goal through her natural magic talent.

That being said, Haruomi seemed to be unconscious in the other world, wandering on the brink between life and death—

Oh well, he should be able to hang in there a little longer. He could watch his life flash before his eyes or whatever, so long as he endured until Asya executed her attack.

"Rushalka, begin attacking with pseudo-divinity. Technique of assured annihilation!"

Asya yelled hoarsely, as hard as she could.

Her blue partner was no slouch either. Having lost one wing, fallen on the white desert, groaning, she was in no state to fight. However, Rushalka still raised her head bravely, glaring forcefully at the sky, and roared with all her might.

Kyuahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Two white arrowheads suddenly appeared over Rushalka's head and hurtled towards the dead center of the three hundred Raptors in the sky that were biding their time to launch a heavy offensive.

Thus, through Asya and Rushalka's desperate efforts and magical power, a technique of assured annihilation was unleashed.

"Isn't that—Haruga-kun's power!?"

A smile bloomed on Orihime's face.

Rushalka had suddenly used offensive magic. Ice, snowflakes, and cold air were blowing in the sky above, rampaging unchecked, slaughtering the sword-wielding Raptors.

Apart from the blizzard, Rushalka also created white arrowheads.

Similar to ceramics in material, their texture resembled white porcelain.

These beautiful arrowheads were vicious too. Firing sweeping blue-white lasers from their tips nonstop, they sliced through the Raptors' bodies.

Unmistakable. Asya-san was using the Rune of the Bow!

Orihime glanced at Asya the senior witch, lying on the ground nearby.

The feedback of Rushalka's pain had rendered Asya unconscious, but the former Shootdown Ace of Europe had succeeded in her difficult task.

Attacked by the technique of assured annihilation, the Raptors in the sky above were now in disarray.

Preoccupied with fleeing from the dragonslaying laser beams, they even forgot about attacking Orihime and the others on the ground. However, whether this attack alone was able to wipe out the enemies... One could not be so sure.

Orihime had a faint feeling that Rushalka would probably exhaust her strength before then.

Was it a witch's instinct? For some reason, Orihime was quite certain. She had to do something herself too.

"Akuro-Ou... Lend me strength."

If Asya-san could do it, so can I.

Such a thought did not cross Orihime's mind at all. Juujouji Orihime had neither the talent nor that kind of confidence. However—

"Simply stated, all that was required was recreating the same feeling as from that time...!"

After feeling "connected" to Hal for a brief instant, Asya had immediately summoned the rune.

Through this, Orihime reasoned out the cause on her own. She knew that chances of success were not high, but regardless, what she needed to do now was do everything in her power and struggle as hard as she could.

Taking the challenge. Courage. Determination. Foolhardiness. Resignation. Trusting to chance.

Orihime's mindset was optimistic and a little irresponsible, while very resigned to the notion that "In the end, success still depended on whether God was accommodating"—

She thought of the boy she loved the most in the whole wide world.

To be honest, she felt that Haruga Haruomi had quite a lot of flaws despite his areas of excellence. Lack of sociability, keeping many secrets, inexplicably obstinate.

But even after pointing out so many of his flaws, Orihime could not help but say.

(But I love you. I love you so much.)

She truly dared not say this in front of others. Too embarrassing.

These words should be left until a time *when the two of them were alone*. Besides, Orihime thought, I love Haruga-kun so much, and Haruga-kun also _____ me, so—

"The bond between us should be enough for him to transmit magical power to me across worlds."

This confidence allowed her to recall the feeling when she was "one with" her beloved.

Then Orihime felt it.

Something was fondling her chest—the left breast nearest to a witch's heart. Probably as before, it was his right hand groping randomly.

"My goodness. Sure enough, Haruga-kun is so perverted."

By now, Orihime had already memorized the sensation of these hands.

"I will let you... grope as much as you want. You are the only one I would say these words to. Because that is how much—I love you."



Carefully savoring her loving feelings for Haruga Haruomi, she reconstructed her spiritual link.

The Rune of the Bow appeared on the back of her left hand. Then all she needed to do next was use a technique of assured annihilation as usual, unleashing magical power to the max—

At that very moment, Orihime and her partner Akuro-Ou underwent a dramatic change.

Feeling as though she were struck by lightning, Orihime came to a sudden realization.

Part 3

In the past, Haruga Haruomi had said the following to Juujouji Orihime.

I don't think you're cut out to be a witch. You are too upstanding, too wholesome. However, former dragon king Hinokagutsuchi had said that descent into darkness and unorthodoxy was not the only path available.

'It is a principle of nature that the sacred light of the priestess can be used to bring the demonic 'serpent' closer to divinity.'

Orihime reestablished her link with the companion in another world.

Originally, Orihime's power should not be capable of accomplishing this, but she knew—Her thoughts and feelings for her beloved would be sufficient to enable her to surmount this challenge.

Even without tainting herself with darkness and fiendish qualities, she could still become stronger.

This confidence pulled Orihime to a higher realm, granting her new blessings.

"Light...?"

Orihime whispered lightly.

The affinity of her partner, Akuro-Ou, was Fire.

However, leviathans with multiple affinities would occasionally arise.

There were two of these rare cases right by Orihime's side.

Asya's "Blue" Rushalka had dual attributes of Water and the Moon.

Luna's "Good Witch of the South" Glinda had dual attributes of Gravity and Illusion.

Both were renowned leviathans whose stature in the witch world had earned them monikers, due to their powerful magic, varied abilities, and capable partners.

Orihime had personally seen these "Shootdown Ace-class" leviathans in action.

Hence, she instantly understood the identity of what resided within Akuro-Ou, the fire-aligned leviathan.

"Another power..."

It was an awakening, growth.

Rather than darkness granting Akuro-Ou a new power, it was the growth of a witch with a sacred heart and soul that allowed a second pseudo-divinity to appear in Akuro-Ou—the new power unleashed by Orihime.

This happened to take place just as Rushalka's full burst attack ended.

"Akuro-Ou, use sun magic!"

Kuohhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Roaring, her partner invoked the second pseudo-divinity.

Akuro-Ou was an emulation of a *fire deity*. The new power was the Sun. Emitting light and heat to illuminate the world, it was a *solar deity*'s power to banish darkness.

What this sacred power created was of course—

At the ruins that resembled an open-pit mine, there were four leviathans and hundreds of wounded Raptors.

Seeing the product of Akuro-Ou's pseudo-divinity, hanging high above—in the sky—Hazumi was very touched.

"It's really like the sun... Nee-sama, you are so amazing!"

Akuro-Ou had created a "gigantic sphere of light" in the sky.

Seventy or eighty meters in diameter, it was giving off sacred golden light.

This sphere occupied the air above them. The targets—the hundreds of Raptors equipped with swords—were circling there. Even though Akuro-Ou and Minadzuki were growling to keep them at bay, they continued to fly haphazardly in the air, looking for a chance to attack.

Next, the offensive began. The sphere of light fired invisible rays in a frenzy.

Without activating magical sight, Hazumi would not be able to see these rays.

From all over the "giant sphere of light," the rays shot out in every direction.

Even a glancing blow was fatal. Raptors melted with a sizzle when struck, instantly vaporizing. They were like snow sculptures coming into contact with super-high temperatures.

Accuracy in aim was not high, but the rays were too many to count.

Furthermore, they were invisible and impossible to dodge. The Raptors were vaporized one after another.

This was a combined skill between the pseudo-divinity of the Sun and the Rune of the Bow that had crossed worlds to grant Orihime power. Its potency made Hazumi watch in fascination. At that moment, she heard a feeble voice call to her.

"H-Hazumi, -san."

"Luna-san! Are you okay!?"

Just earlier, Glinda had been struck by the dragonslaying sword.

After fainting from the resulting pain, Luna Francois now regained consciousness. Hearing the senior witch's voice, Hazumi rushed over to her side.

"I will ask Minadzuki to heal you now!"

"No... Before that, we need to do *that* together first."

Supported by Hazumi, Luna Francois managed to sit up.

It must be very painful. Luna had her right hand pressed against her magnificent bust—in the area over the heart. Her beautiful face also looked haggard.

However, the blonde master-class witch was gazing at Hazumi with intense energy in her eyes.

"Namely, to slice open this barrier by using the same method as Asya and Orihime-san to borrow Harry's rune. It should be possible if the Rune of the Twin Katana could be used."

"B-But will I manage?"

Hazumi's cousin Orihime had awakened Akuro-Ou's dual attributes.

Hazumi believed instinctively that Orihime's power as a witch was most likely even greater than the Level 3 Shirasaka Hazumi.

Hearing Hazumi's question, Luna Francois replied without hesitation, "I suppose not. Orihime-san's current power is probably Level 4... Possibly master-class, even, but you haven't reached that yet. So, you will be in charge of supporting me. Just as you can see, I am in this sorry state."

Due to the earlier damage, Luna was all haggard. Speaking faster than normal, her usual mischievous composure was nowhere to be seen.

"But rest assured, there is no reason why I can't do it if Asya could in her injured state. So please help me out, because controlling the twin katana is harder than the bow. Understood?"

"But Luna-san, in your condition..."

"Silly child. Don't think about such matters until we succeed in the magic!"

"B-But—"

"If you used other magic first, you might forget the feeling of Harry's touch just now. Because of that, we have to finish before that happens."

Without the slightest hesitation, Luna chose her pride as a witch over the condition of her body.

Common sense would dictate the opposite. Rather than bothering about stuff like magic, it would be only right to worry about a companion's health from a humanitarian perspective. However, Luna reprimanded Hazumi for having the wrong notion.

This was her "rotten" side that she normally masked using gentle words and behavior.

"Hurry up. Orihime-san can't possibly last forever!"

"U-Understood!"

Hazumi extended her left hand and clasped the senior witch's left hand, thinking single-mindedly about Haruomi-senpai who was in a different world.

A minute or two later, a cross-shaped emblem appeared on the backs of their left hands.

"A-A reaction!"

"...Excellent. According to the feeling just now, Harry was clearly about to croak, but it looks like he managed to survive. Did someone perform first aid...?"

Compared to Hazumi who simply felt innocent joy, Luna was thoroughly practical.

Despite seeing the same Rune of the Twin Katana, the two girls reacted completely differently. It was not simply because of age and experience, but presumably related to a difference in resolve and mental strength too.

I must work even harder—Hazumi thought intensely to herself.

Just as during the summer break in New York, what she had learned from Shamiram inside that ark.

Meanwhile, Luna Francois finally got ready to activate the technique of assured annihilation.

"Yin and yang... Combining diametrically opposed elements into an attack embodying the rivalry of complementary opposites. Even without Harry here, I must make it succeed...!"

Holding hands with her junior, the master-class witch declared boldly.

Hazumi secretly glanced to the side.

"Good Witch of the South" Glinda was collapsed powerlessly on the white sand. No signs of standing up. The twin katana did not look like they were going to appear.

Even with a master-class witch's power, was this highly challenging task too great a burden?

However, Luna gave a great shout, "The opposite powers of light and darkness must reach a balance in order to use this rune. Compared to the 'darkness' I am responsible for, the 'light' seems to be too weak. Holy and evil, right and wrong, yin and yang, demonic and divine... Hazumi-san, you and Minadzuki need to become even more sacred existences!"

"Y-Yes!"

Hazumi did not know what counted as sacred existences.

She simply knew she must not falter. Picturing her ideal single-mindedly, making maximum effective use of her magical power and partner, she strove for that goal, just as what Luna Francois was doing right now.

"I wish... for all the people I treasure to be safe and sound. I don't want to see them hurt. So please, Minadzuki!"

She conveyed her sincere prayer to the leviathan.

Hovering near them at that very moment, Minadzuki cried out clearly.

Rahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Nineteen runes of Ruruk Soun appeared over the emerald serpentine dragon's head, glowing with platinum splendor.

'I summon the twin blades of exorcism, to deliver seraphic punishment to nefarious evil dragons.'

This arrangement signified exorcism and the purification of evil magical power.

Minadzuki possessed two forelimbs. Her right forelimb usually held a jewel, but this time, the jewel had transformed into a great blade at some point.

Naturally, the kodachi was held by the left forearm. With a sword in each hand, she became a dual-wielding swordsman.

However, unlike the stances of human swordsmen, she was holding both swords in *reverse grip*. Using the two swords—slicing vertically with the larger and horizontally with the smaller of the two—Minadzuki carved a cross on the ground of sand.

This was the mark of the twin katana. Hazumi rejoiced from the bottom of her heart.

The serpentine dragon leviathan then stabbed the twin blades into the ground as though concluding, pouring a great quantity of magical power into the cross emblem on the sand!

"We did it... Thank goodness!"

Not only that, but Minadzuki used magic again. This time, seven runes of Ruruk Soun appeared to signify "healing hand."

The effects were readily apparent.

Wounded in the back by the dragonslaying sword, collapsed on the ground until now, Glinda the chimera—the lion leviathan with a goat head on her right shoulder and a dragon head on the left shoulder—slowly stood up.

She stretched. The wound on her back had healed!

"Well... In the end, you still used the power of healing."

"S-Sorry!"

The painful expression vanished completely from Luna Francois' lovely face.

Her quickened breathing also returned to normal. She seemed to be in much better shape. Now that her partner had recovered, the pain felt by the witch also vanished.

However, Hazumi apologized on reflex. Doing so had clearly gone against orders.

"Don't worry, though I don't think you needed to apologize," said the blonde genius witch calmly.

She had regained her usual composure, probably because the healing was very effective.

"This would seem to be a huge matter for you. Besides, the all-important mission is accomplished. I have no reason to complain."

Minadzuki had stabbed the twin blades into the desert at a point.

With that point as the center, a zone twenty or thirty meters in radius had turned into an "ocean."

What had been clearly an endless white desert earlier now had this one sea-blue zone turning into seawater.

Rather than a vivid blue, it was the color of Tokyo Bay.

Once the transformation into seawater was complete, they would be able to return to their original world... Informed this by instinct, Hazumi listened to Luna Francois.

"In our world of witches, results are everything. Regardless of means taken, the winner dictates what is considered right and proper. Hence, Hazumi-san, well done."

"I-I see."

Luna Francois winked casually at her and made a thumbs-up.

Hazumi was dumbfounded by her frivolous attitude when it happened.

The pseudo-sun that had been firing invisible rays nonstop—It suddenly vanished.

There were some remaining Raptors left in the gray sky. Although only a few dozen, surviving remnants were still targets. Why had the attack stopped when there were still enemies remaining?

"Nee-sama!?"

Orihime was collapsed nearby.

Staring at the gray sky the whole time, she had ordered Akuro-Ou to use pseudo-divinity of the Sun. Unfamiliar magic had sapped her strength excessively, finally causing her to collapse.

The nine-tailed Akuro-Ou also dematerialized and vanished.

Now that the rays that had been killing enemies every few seconds vanished, the sword-equipped Raptors fleeing all over the sky calmed down.

There were fifty or sixty enemies remaining in the sky.

On their own, they flew towards the ground — to attack again!

However, Minadzuki still had her twin blades stabbed into the "sea-blue ground." Pouring in her own magical power, Glinda supported the dual-wielding swordsman.

"L-Luna-san, what should we do!?"

"Minadzuki needs to control the twin katana while Glinda needs to maintain her assistance. Neither of them are free to intercept the enemies..."

At this rate, they were sitting ducks to be slaughtered by the Raptors.

Just as they held their breaths nervously, an unexpected savior descended from the heavens.

Ruahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!

Blue Rusahlka. Her lost wing had been restored. Hazumi's earlier prayer for the safety of everyone she treasured had not only healed Glinda but Rushalka too.

The wyvern with the lone horn on her forehead charged into the flock of Raptors.

A blizzard and dragonslaying lasers. Another full burst attack. She had used the Rune of the Bow.

"I guess she's trying to make up for her spectacular failure just now..." Luna Francois murmured.

In the next instant, Hazumi, Luna and the fainted Orihime suddenly began to sink. The sea-blue ground finally transformed into "total seawater."

The three witches gradually sank into the sea.

"!?"

Hazumi looked up at what was no longer a gray sky but dim seawater.

The dozens of Raptors and Rushalka also disappeared gradually from sight, replaced by the seawater surrounding them in all directions—

Then the overhead view turned into the blue sky of Earth.

Instead of sand, their foothold was the JMSDF escort ship that had been transporting them several hours earlier—On the deck.

Minadzuki's super senses detected that the air smelled the same as that of Tokyo in September.

By using the Rune of the Twin Katana to slice through part of Pavel Galad's barrier, they finally managed to return to their original world.

Naturally, the escort ship carrying Hazumi and company was floating in Tokyo Bay rather than a desert.

Returning together with the witches, the three leviathans—Glinda, Minadzuki, and Akuro-Ou—dematerialized. The "serpents" gradually disappeared.

"How is Nee-sama!?"

Hazumi hastily looked for her cousin and was relieved. Orihime was lying close by.

A peaceful sleeping face. The moment she exhaled, Hazumi realized something.

"Where is Asya-san...?"

She looked around but could not find any signs of the silver-haired witch.

Did she hide? Or—Worry surged from the bottom of Hazumi's heart.

Shrugging, Luna Francois said very calmly, "Once we finish gathering information to figure out the current situation clearly, we must make haste to set off. Harry is more than likely in a crisis. We need to work as hard as we can."

It seemed like she had chosen her words on purpose to ignore the fourth person.

Part 4

"At last—It's over for now, huh?"

After some time, Asya could finally take a break and relax.

Although it took quite some work, Asya finally wiped out every Raptor that Pavel Galad had left inside the barrier.

This was after the three witches and three leviathans had returned to the Earth together.

Asya and Rushalka had used the Rune of the Bow to attack the flock of Raptors with sweeping fire for ten-odd minutes. Then after that, she watched out for reinforcements but no signs showed up even after ten minutes.

Hence, it was worth it for her to stay behind on purpose to help her companions retreat.

The white desert stretched endlessly towards the gray sky. Right now, there were no living creatures in this extremely bizarre world apart from herself and Rushalka. At least, within her vision.

Holding the rear to help everyone else escape—

Asya made the call that this job must be left to her.

"That being said, the price is I have to stay back alone. There was no other way," she told herself.

Back then, no one else could complete this task. Also, there was one reason that she could not ignore.

"I wouldn't be able to sleep at night unless I repaid my debt to Luna."

The reason for Rushalka and Glinda suffering heavy wounds during this battle.

In particular, Asya was to blame due to her mistake. Back then, she had taken action with the belief she could wipe out all the enemies surrounding Glinda in one fell swoop—In the end, two enemies survived.

This caused the two master-class witches' partners to suffer severe injuries.

"Luna is so smart. I'm sure she noticed."

The two of them were equals. Even if Hazumi and Orihime did not notice, Luna Francois must have discerned Asya's mistake.

Rather than getting mocked by Luna for this later, it would be better to settle the score upfront first.

She would be lying if she denied having such thoughts. Hence, Asya had left the group discreetly to take on this responsibility.

The rightful star of the battlefield, Shootdown Ace Asya, must tend to this backstage role—

"....."

No. Actually, there was another option.

Heroically making playthings out of the approaching Raptors in the air, then accelerating swiftly during the seven or eight seconds before her friends returned to Earth, descending. Meeting up with them at the last second to return as one group—

Too early a descent and she would end up drawing the enemies to her friends.

She needed Rushalka to fly faster than every other leviathan without any miscalculation in timing. Asya and her partner should be up to this task.

However.

Instead of doing that, Asya chose the safe route.

She had a premonition. She might be a fraction of a second late in timing her descent, or she might fail to make Rushalka fly at her rightful top speed.

"My sensitivity and magical power has dulled a little, even though in all honesty it is just a tiny bit..."

Under the gray sky, Asya was standing alone in this abnormally white desert.

Perhaps only because no one could hear her talking to herself, Asya was able to voice these words. Finally admitting her long-held doubt, the words slipped out of her mouth.

The self-hypnosis to improve feminine prowess. Loss of appetite as an apparent side effect.

Along with that came doubts of "My power as a witch seems to have weakened!?"

Many symptoms had came up over the past month or so, but Asya had relegated things to the back burner because they had survived the intense battle against dragon king Hannibal.

More importantly—She was reluctant to admit it.

It was precisely thanks to the feminine prowess granted by that hypnosis spell that she had found the opportunity to make a comeback on the romance front.

She had not dared to consider the possibility of this magic having side effects. But this time, the hypnosis' effect surfaced to the forefront in this manner...

"I'm so hungry."

Gurgle rumble rumble rumble. Her stomach growled for the first time in a long while.

After using hypnosis magic, Asya's stomach had never growled. Most likely, it was injured Rushalka's feedback of pain that had caused her witch nature to become exposed.

What an annoying noise.

Asya desired nourishment intensely. Calories, fulfillment—The source of magic.

"Urghhhh. But all my earlier efforts would be for nothing if the spell fell apart now..."

Asya was wearing her usual military jacket.

The jacket was not cute at all, the furthest thing from feminine. But it was durable and she did not need to worry about getting it dirty. In addition, it featured Asya's own clever design.

She had added several secret pockets to the inner lining.

Due to force of habit over many years—These pockets always carried small packets of food at all times.

Ten-odd candies, biscuits, heat-resistant chocolate commonly issued as part of US military rations, assorted dried fruits and nuts, cereal bars, beef jerky, crackers, powdered milk, niboshi, sports youkan, energy jelly, seasonings such as salt, pepper, and sugar...

Even after her appetite was reduced to a normal person's, Asya still replenished and replaced the food in her jacket.

She never found the chance to wean this habit. Or perhaps somewhere in the back of her mind, she was worried whether this food might come in handy *one day*.

Rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble rumble.

A low noise. Her stomach growling again. This was the longest rumble yet.

At least I'll have a candy—Just as Asya reached for her secret pocket, she shook her head forcefully a few times. All would be lost if she ate this.

She was informed by instinct. That candy could very well render her hypnosis magic to lose effect.

If she were to lose her hard-earned feminine prowess, her life could very well become hopeless!

"I get the feeling it won't succeed even if I tried to hypnotize myself again..." Asya murmured.

This was her instinct as a witch. Conversely, if hypnosis could be applied repeatedly—That would be quite dangerous too. After all, it was powerful hypnosis capable of altering personalities, a kind of brainwashing, even leading to the possible collapse of one's ego...

"A-Anyway!"

She raised her voice in an attempt to distract herself from hunger.

Asya suddenly raised her right arm. Rushalka flew down from the sky, but not in her usual giant body length of ten-odd meters. Asya had shrunk her down to roughly one third in size.

The severed wing had been restored successfully.

It was all thanks to Hazumi and Minadzuki's healing magic.

Asya had already cast Leaping Power Enhancement on herself. Light as a swallow, she jumped nimbly onto Rushalka's back.

Next, she was going to travel, riding on her wyvern partner's back.

In front of her was the mysterious set of ruins resembling an open-pit mine. Her destination was the bottom of the pit, over five hundred meters deep by visual estimates.

"By strengthening the Rune of the Sword, Pavel Galad was able to oppose Haruomi's whose power had risen to the point of matching Hannibal..."

Earlier, a blue spark had shot out from the bottom of the ruins.

This was what produced the Rune of the Sword and the reason why Asya and her companions had fought such a difficult battle.

"If the secret of the power up is as I suspect..."

There was no other witch here to aid her in using the Rune of the Twin Katana to execute the technique of the rivalry of complementary opposites, so she had no way of escaping this dimension either. In that case, satisfying her own curiosity would be more constructive.

Hence, Asya and her partner took flight, making her way to confirm whether her hypothesis was correct or not.

Part 5

When Hal regained consciousness, the first to appear in his mind was a question.

(...Who are these people?)

He was lying face up on the ground with three boys and girls next to him.

If this were a bedroom, they would be standing next to the pillow, but this was a soft lawn. Hal felt a sharp pain in his chest—His heart.

He seemed to remember getting stabbed by a sword there...

A bit lost, Hal decided to sit up first.

"Thank goodness! Haruga-kun woke up~!"

"But it looks like he's not fully conscious yet. He's spacing out, there's no light in his eyes."

The trio seemed to be worrying about him.

Two girls and a boy.

The two girls were making a lot of noise. One seemed to be a lively short-haired girl while the other was short and wearing her hair in twintails. They both looked like they knew Hal.

The third person, the boy, had his head bowed, looking at Hal silently.

He was wearing a summer knit hat. With a slender physique, his entire being oozed style. Few of Hal's acquaintances cultivated this kind of image.

The trio seemed to be high school students. Although their uniforms had differences due to male and female styles, they belonged to the same school.

Okay, who the heck are these people? Hal was very perplexed.

(They know my name, so they're acquaintances after all, right?)

Besides, why was he lying on a lawn?

This park looked quite large. *What had I been just before losing consciousness?* He had faint memories of falling from the sky and his right hand grabbing something...

Hal clenched his right hand into a fist subconsciously then everything came to him.

He had grabbed something soft and elastic at the time—Recalling that instant, he remembered the name of the classmates in front of him.

"Uh. Mutou-san and... Funaki-san. Why are you here?"

"Wow—Haruga-kun, you finally went back to normal."

"So true. You weren't reacting at all just now. I was worried, wondering if we should send you to the hospital~"

Mutou-san grinned and Funaki-san sighed in relief.

"The prez told us 'I am a bit worried the red dragon might lose' so we came to check things out. But man, the prez is amazing. She predicted 'you might run into Haruga' and she was right."

"The prez—Oh, President M?"

"Of course."

The one referred to as the prez by Hal and Mutou-san was the eccentric President M of the UFO Research Club.

Hal managed to remember President M too. However, he glanced at the silent handsome guy. This guy... Who was he? No idea at all.

Was this their first encounter, or had Hal rudely forgotten him?

"Oh right, Haruga-kun, you've never met him. He's a member of the UFO Research Club too. This is Sakuraba-senpai. I think I've mentioned him to you before, right?"

"Yeah, now that you mention it," said Mutou-san.

Sakuraba-senpai—Hal had definitely heard this name before.

Priding in his superior investigation abilities, he spent all his time chasing scoop outside of school.

Since he seldom visited the clubroom, Hal had never seen him before. They met at last today...

However, Sakuraba-senpai remained quiet the whole time. Even after Mutou-san introduced him to Hal, he did not say a single word.

Simply looking at Hal's face, he nodded silently in acknowledgement.

"Maybe he doesn't come around the clubroom because he's shy and doesn't like to talk?"

"Correct. But it was thanks to Senpai that we were able to find you. When the silver dragon—the one transformed from that handsome guy—and the red dragon flew into New Town, he did not evacuate. Instead, he was taking photos from a rooftop in Kinshichō."

Mutou-san made thumbs-up towards Sakuraba-senpai.

"When the fight between the two dragons was won by the silver one and the red one fell here—Kiyosumi Park—he caught it on his camera too. Also when the prez ordered all of us to find the red dragon, Sakuraba-senpai told us the red one fell here as soon as we called him."

"Wow..."

Sure enough, his ability to gather information was far beyond a student's.

In addition, Mutou-san told Hal that she and Funaki-san had biked over from Ryougoku where the school was located.

A distance of roughly two train stations, but traffic over road and rail was restricted during dragon strikes. Apart from aircraft, bicycles were the most efficient means of locomotion in Tokyou currently.

"Say, what was the situation when you found me?"

"Well... Sakuraba-senpai said 'I saw the red dragon fall in this park!' so we followed his testimony and entered to check things out. Then we found you lying next to the unconscious dragon."

"...But the red dragon isn't next to me anymore."

"It suddenly vanished before you woke up. That's called 'dematerializing,' right?" Still learning magic terms, Mutou-san explained to him.

Hal focused his mind and examined the state of his heart—The heartmetal. It had been aching ever since he woke up.

(The current output of magical power... Probably about 30% of the usual.)

However, the damage was lighter than imagined. How incredible.

His heartmetal, i.e. heart, had been pierced by a deep stab of the dragonslaying sword. It would not have been surprising if the Crimson Queen had perished together with Haruga Haruomi's soul that had merged with her.

However, both of them had survived. Since his heartmetal was fine, he should be able to resummon the queen.

(It's Asya and Juujouji who saved me...)

For some reason, Hal was deeply convinced of this. Although just for an instant, Hal had connected his hazy consciousness with the minds of the witches who had disappeared from Earth.

After that, he should have entrusted the power of the runes to the witches who seemed to be in a crisis of their own.

This part of his memories was quite vague, but there was something he remembered clearly—

The sensations from his right hand came in two categories. The really small belonged to Asya while the overflowing abundance was Orihime's.

Having personally experienced how they felt to his touch, his memory could not possibly be mistaken.

For some reason, contact with the girls had decreased the synchronization between Hal's soul and the queen.

That was probably teh reason. When the wound was inflicted on the queen's chest, only 30 or 40% was reflected onto Hal. As a result, he survived luckily.

Putting aside for now why "the sensation of breasts" would have this kind of effect.

Hal raised another question. "The silver dragon didn't come to deliver a final blow?"

"Nope. Because it looks like he's busy. Over there."

Mutou-san pointed at the sky. In the direction indicated, there was an aerial battle in progress.

Wielding the dragonslaying sword, the silver dragon Pavel Galad was chasing a white dragon—it was the dragon king's gallant form that had not made an appearance for a very long time.

Princess Yukikaze's dragon form was much more slender than the Crimson Queen's.

Successor to the Arrow that formed a pair with the Rune of the Bow in Hal's possession, she turned her white body into a single dragonslaying arrow. Pavel Galad flew as fast as he could, trying to attack the fearsome Princess Yukikaze, but—

Unable to catch her. Unable to catch her. Unable to catch her.

The princess was not only fast but her flight trajectory was also very complicated.

Zig zags, sudden turns, spiral flight. Pavel Galad was no slouch in the speed department, but he picked the wrong opponent.

"He's playing such an intense game of tag, of course he doesn't have the time to come to me..."

It looked like Princess Yukikaze saved his life.

Phew. Hal sighed. Time for a change of pace. Right now, he had to drive the happily rampaging dragons out of Tokyo.

Next, Hal was inspired to play a little trick that even he found "a bit underhanded."

"Let's try it, I guess...?"

The ones who rescued him, Mutou-san, Funaki-san, and Sakuraba-san were looking worriedly at Hal, who did not seem quite alright. Despite a whole pile of mysteries, the trio did not try to pry and question him. Surely, it must be because they knew it was currently an emergency situation.

Normally speaking, he should hurry and tell them to evacuate. However, Hal made the following suggestion instead, "Hey everyone. If it's okay with you guys, I've got a favor to ask."

Meanwhile, he wondered to himself. *Perhaps President M predicted even this as well?*

After parting ways with his school mates, Hal was left alone.

Walking steadily along the Kiyosu Bridge, he was making his way to the front lines where Pavel Galad and Princess Yukikaze were fighting.

Currently, an emergency evacuation alert had been issued in New Town.

A great number—countless cars were stopped on the streets.

Apart from designated emergency vehicles, all road traffic was prohibited during the alert. Drivers immediately abandoned their cars and checked on their cellphones for the nearest shelter.

Places such as stadiums, parks, river banks, or schools with vast sports grounds were used as shelters.

The residents in this neighborhood seemed to have all evacuated. Hal was the only person walking on the road, surrounded by silence.

Along the way, Hal went "Huh...?"

How odd. Noticing something felt off about himself, he paused in his steps.

Rather than physical discomfort, it was a matter of the mind. Those fellow members of the UFO Research Club whom he had been talking to earlier—Those three.

Hal had forgotten their faces and names again.

Apart from that, his memories of the sixteen years that he had lived as Haruga Haruomi were fuzzy.

Come to think of it, what am I? A human? A high school student? A treasure hunter? A Tyrannos who had inherited dragonslaying runes?

No way—Hal realized a certain possibility.

Could it be that his transformation into a dragon had progressed all at once because there was no one to chat with him?

All kinds of memories had gone fuzzy, but there was one thing he remembered very clearly.

The battle with Pavel Galad. The battle he had experienced only hours earlier. Towards the end, he had merged with the Crimson Queen to clash head on with the silver dragon...

The enemy was a hot-blooded Tyrannos. Feeling fervor and fighting spirit from up close, Hal had fought intensely with him.

He recalled every second vividly in his mind.

The enemy used the dragonslaying sword to attack him and he defended with imperishable protection. However, the impact and magical power unleashed by the blade was transmitted mercilessly to Hal—no, the queen—shaking his skeleton and internal organs...

What remembered these details was not Hal's brain but his heart, i.e. heartmetal, probably.

The most important organ of a dragon told him that *this* was what dragonkind considered supreme joy and pleasure.

"S-Sure, whatever... I don't want to experience that ever again..."

His conscious fading, Hal denied with all his might.

However, these thoughts did not reach his heart, i.e. heartmetal. The thoughts of xxxxga xxxxomi held very little power to command now. After all, he could not even remember his own name exactly, much less the events of his life...

"Hey brat, the situation is bad here."

He heard someone's bored voice by his ear.

However, Hal could not even tell who was speaking. Most likely someone who knew xxxxga xxxxxxxx...

"Oh."

By the time he noticed, his stride had lengthened.

Every step would take him a great distance forward. His footsteps also sounded inexplicably heavy. Hal stomped the ground with a "thud!", shaking the road surface and even flattening the railing.

Before he knew it, his eye level had risen in height.

While walking, he could gaze down on traffic lights and utility poles...

He noticed that his leg length, body weight, height—everything had increased to outrageous levels. Right now, he was probably standing around twenty meters tall.

A long, thick tail seemed to be extending from his coccyx...

He looked at his hand. It was covered with crimson dragon scales.

His arms, his chest, his torso, below the waist, everything was a dragon's.

"Oh..."

Thud. Thud. Thud. With heavy footsteps, Hal marched on forward.

The urban scenery around the Kiyosu Bridge followed a "trendy metropolitan" style, but to a dragon's eyes, it was nothing more than paper props, instantly wreckable with a gentle poke...

In fact, it definitely would be wrecked. Because right now, his was a dragon king's body.

However, his legs felt harder and harder to move.

"My condition isn't too good, I guess?"

His chest—the heartmetal—was hurting. The wound had clearly closed up—Hal did not know if someone performed first aid on him—but it seemed to be rupturing now.

The dragonslaying sword had forcefully pierced this energy source of dragon's body.

Forget about a puny human, in his current state, there was no he could move a dragon king's body.

"I suppose I'll... rest for a bit."

Pavel Galad and Princess Yukikaze were engaged in a fierce battle somewhere in the sky over New Town.

Fortunately, it was not nearby. He should be able to find a quiet place to lie down and let his heartmetal rest. But time was running out.

"If I take too long, the princess might dismember Galad..."

Purely in terms of power as a dragon, Pavel Galad was no match for Princess Yukikaze at all. No matter what, the innocent-looking beautiful

maiden was a dragon king. That being said, the silver dragon had no choice. Hal could not imagine him gracefully admitting defeat either.

"This seems like a nice spot."

There was a middle school next to the Kiyosu Bridge. Hal entered the school premises.

There were no people inside. They had probably evacuated. Passing through the courtyard that happened to be in the shade, he curled next to the school building.

He entered a coiled up sleeping posture.

Using ***** omi's knowledge, he thought to himself, *if this were a J. R. R. Tolkien novel, I would be using an underground dwarven treasure vault beneath a mountain as my bed...*

Thus, he nodded off for now. Not deep slumber, but just a nap.

When the crimson dragon smelled humans—and female at that—he shifted his body slightly. Rather than one, three females were approaching. Footsteps were heard too.

Grrrrrrrr... hhhhhh.

He growled as though talking in his sleep. His eyes remained tightly shut. Neither did his posture change.

I just want to sleep. What are these people doing here?

Are they trying to mess with me? If that's the case—

The napping dragon snickered. How should he deal with these rude people? Breathe fire on them? Swat them away with his tail?

Or should he give them riddles to solve, devouring them if they failed to give the right answer?

Everything depends on how I, the dragon, am feeling.

Waiting for the human visitors, the dragon whose former identity was
xxxxxx napped while entertaining himself with fantasies of their
demise...

Chapter 5 - Revival

Part 1

Asya's childhood friend, Haruga Haruomi, once said, "The hiding place of treasure will reflect the owner's personality... Sometimes."

Avoiding a direct assertion, it was very much in line with his cynical style.

In any case, the young man whom Asya had known for many years was an expert in this area. She ought to respect the rule of thumb arising from his experience.

Furthermore, there was an example that served as corroboration.

The former dragon king, Hinokagutsuchi. The reason why she had hidden *that* there was shockingly arbitrary, stunning Asya when she first heard about it, but it was quite reasonable in hindsight and difficult for others to find.

Then there was Pavel Galad.

This hot-blooded and rigid man.

Given his personality, surely he would hide treasure in the depths of a building with excessive security, locked in an impregnable treasure vault, sealed with many layers of magic on the door.

"...But not cowardly to the extreme extent of 'hoarding without using,' which fits that hot-blooded hero's 'style,' I guess."

Locating what she expected to find, Asya nodded to herself.

"Because he would take out his treasure and make effective use of it when needed..."

Inside the desert barrier where Pavel Galad had trapped the witches, there was a set of mysterious ruins resembling an open-pit mine.

Its shape was like a bowl-shaped "hole" that had been excavated, with a radius of two kilometers and a depth of five hundred meters.

Riding on the miniaturized Rushalka's back, Asya arrived at the bottom of the pit.

In the center was a black stone in the form of a rectangular prism. It looked like an altar. If a two-meter-tall human lay down on it, his feet would probably not stick out.

An elite dragon could pretty rest its palm on top.

There were two kinds of things placed on top of it.

One kind consisted of *small stone fragments*. Black in color, it was almost pulverized.

The other kind consisted of *two sharp stones with virtually no smooth part on their surface*. These stones were black too. Using minerals on Earth as a comparison, they resembled quartz.

Asya was seeing these things for the first time. However, she knew very well what they were.

"Flint..."

She heard that Haruomi's late father had hidden one inside his pocket watch.

She heard that one had been casually left in the garden of Hinokagutsuchi's palatial residence, the Dragon Palace Court.

She heard that it was the fire-starting stone for reviving the "conqueror's runes." Without this stone, a dragonslaying rune on its own was a wasted treasure.

This stone could be considered the beginning of everything that had roped Haruga Haruomi into this war.

"Two flints... And one flint's worth of fragments. So Pavel Galad kept three of these precious stones here."

Why was one of them shattered? Asya could guess the answer.

It had shattered just before the Raptors began their attack just now.

When the flint shattered, it shot out a spark that activated the Rune of the Sword in the air, turning into the prime mover that had forced Rushalka and the others into a tough predicament...

Asserting as a master-class witch, she was certain she had seen the same fire yesterday too.

On that "island" that had appeared in Tokyo Bay to serve as bait, Pavel Galad had strengthened the dragonslaying sword in order to resist the dragonslaying bow.

The flames enveloping the sword's blade looked similar to the flint spark she had seen just now.

"Flint... It looks like it can be used as a magical catalyst for all kinds of purposes. This is a secret treasure that dragons would devote lifetimes to find. How many did he stock up?"

Pavel Galad was probably carrying a few on his person right now.

This was to use them as a trump card to oppose Haruomi's dragonslaying bow. Perhaps the silver dragon had discovered a mineral vein of flint instead of single stones.

"Impressive as always, President M. Her oracle was right on the money."

Rather than blocking it... The enemy rekindled the flame instead.

Just as President M described, Minadzuki's mystic technique of "armistice" had definitely sealed away the Rune of the Sword. However, the silver dragon had used a flint's flame to revive the dragonslaying seal.

The president had said something else, Asya remembered it was—

'Counter a treasure with another treasure. You are advised to release the stored goods.'

Asya came to sudden realization. She had jumped conclusions, thinking this advice was aimed at Haruomi, but—Now she understood.

"So... that advice was for me!"

The instant she felt certain of this, her imagination began to roam freely.

Right now in the mortal realm, Pavel Galad was probably using flint as the catalyst for magic to strengthen himself, putting Haruomi in a difficult battle. And the secret treasure used by the enemy as a trump card was right in front of Asya. If only she could take it back—

"This idea... isn't very realistic. It's not like I found a way to get back."

Despite what Asya was saying, she actually realized it early on.

The Rune of the Twin Katana used by her friends to return was definitely hard to control. Chances of using it successfully on her own were extremely low. However—

Low chance or no chance—No way to tell until she tried.

Naturally, doing this would challenge a witch's limits. Unless she devoted her entire mind and soul to it together with Rushalka, drawing on their full power, it would be futile.

Asya recalled something else. There was more to President M's advice.

'When it is time to make a decision, think about the future—three months from now, three years from now.'

'It will be too late by the time you regret it.'

With trembling hands, Asya searched her jacket's secret pocket.

Taking out a small packet of chocolates, she clutched it while staring at the two flints in front of her, murmuring to herself, "Even if I could return, the rest might not necessary go well..."

Asya felt the words of denial get stuck in her throat, impossible to shake off.

Naturally, this was an illusion. But thanks to that, she was unable to keep finding reasons to justify herself. Instead, she found it impossible not to think about Haruomi, who was most likely in the middle of a battle. In all the battles so far, he had prevailed over his enemies splendidly.

In a way, this was because he had encountered opponents that he was good at dealing with.

During Pavel Galad's counteroffensive, she reached a clear understanding.

If the enemy was an elite dragon or dragon king unconcerned with details, Hal would be able to use the little tricks that were his specialty and overcome the crisis no matter who he faced. However, if the enemy were to

carefully study ways to defeat Haruga Haruomi, then appropriate support was essential.

Because Asya's childhood friend was neither a warrior nor a soldier...

"Hmmmmmm."

She was also very worried about the witches who had returned to Earth.

Pavel Galad was not the only enemy. After him, waiting for them was Princess Yukikaze, the formidable foe of outrageous proportions. Without Shootdown Ace Asya, how much resistance could they shore up against Princess Yukikaze?

"B-But if I return to my past self... The hypnosis will surely lose effect—"

Holding the bar of chocolate, her right hand kept trembling.

Conflicted. Distraught. Self-deception. Guilty conscience. Sincerity towards Haruomi and her witch companions. Maidenly feelings. A selfish desire to attain the happiness she was entitled to. Her pride as a witch. Hesitation. Hesitation. Hesitation. Hesitation...

Asya did not know how long she stood there in one spot.

But in spite of it all.

Arduously, her trembling fingers opened the packet of chocolates, took out a piece, then struggled to deliver it to her mouth—At that very instant...

It was the sound of a pebble kicked by a the tip of a leather shoe.

Asya looked back in surprise, speechless. This was inside a dragon's barrier. At the bottom of an open-pit mine that was like a world heritage site.

A man dressed in a black suit—A human male was walking towards her!

"Pleased to make your acquaintance. I am known as Sophocles to the lords of the dragon world as well as Tyrannoii of both human and dragon origin."

Recalling Haruomi's report, Asya glared at the man in black.

Sophocles. Juujouji Orihime had apparently met him once. This man was in charge of observing dragonkind's game that was called the Road to Kingship and would occasionally contact participants.

"Please forgive my sudden visit. My apologies."

"N-No need to apologize... How did you get here?"

"Didn't the Crimson Queen tell you? I can show up at any corner of the world, be it the surface of the Earth, the distant sea of stars, or passing through the dimensional portal to reach the secret realm of dreams."

He spoke of his elusive arrival in this kind of place as though it were no different from a gentleman's hobby.

Asya finally met the mysterious man named Sophocles. It looked like he was even more of an eccentric than rumored.

"In truth... Predicting that you are about to embark on an extremely dangerous yet meaningful adventure, I had to come meet you no matter what."

Sophocles was quite respectful in attitude, even earnest.

But Asya was certain that this man appearing in front of her was surely the devil's kin and must not be trusted easily.

"O witch. If you are prepared to make a desperate effort to move forward, I am willing to provide all the assistance you need for your adventure. That is how much value I see in the challenge you will be undertaking."

Part 2

"As much as I'm reluctant to admit it... The emergency situation is finally here."

Luna Francois sighed.

An hour or two ago, the trio of witches had finally made their way back to Tokyo Bay. After getting up to speed on the situation, they requested a high-speed helicopter to transport them over to Kiyosumi-Shirakawa in the center of New Town.

This was because they had received news that the Crimson Queen had crashed there.

However, they were taken by surprise when flying over a certain middle school. The Crimson Queen was curled up in the courtyard, sleeping peacefully.

In addition to Luna, Juujouji Orihime and Shirasaka Hazumi were present too.

They immediately ordered the helicopter to land in the school yard, then hurried to the red dragon's side—

"With Harry gone missing, I had a bad feeling about this."

The Crimson Queen was sleeping alone in this kind of place.

One could accept that. Although she was like a puppet, she was a creature after all and probably needed sleep.

However, Haruga Haruomi was not nearby. Did he go somewhere else to get something done, leaving this monster here for now? This was hard to imagine.

Apart from that, Luna was informed by instinct.

She could sense something similar to thoughts from the sleeping dragon. They could be considered feelings too.

So far, the Crimson Queen had been a puppet that acted according to Haruga Haruomi's thoughts. The impression it gave was a lack of emotion, without any intelligence or consciousness.

In addition, there was one more thing. The sleeping red dragon seemed to be giving off an aura of dragonslaying power...

Luna Francois said to her companions, "What do you think?"

"She feels different from before. More like an elite dragon..."

"This might be a weird way of putting it, but to me, she seems more like a human than an animal. B-But it's probably just my imagination!"

Orihime commented worriedly while Hazumi had doubt in her words.

The three witches were in agreement. The sleeping dragon in front of them could very well be the transformation their companion underwent in the worst-case scenario.

Grrrrrrrr... hhhhhh.

The red dragon suddenly made a muffled growl.

Orihime and Hazumi jumped at the same time, huddling together nervously. On the other hand, Luna Francois was very calm, observing the dragon on her own.

The dragon's eyes were still shut. No change in posture either.

Sleep talking? Although the truth was unclear, it seemed like the dragon was not in deep slumber.

"Looks like a knight needs to be summoned as a guard. Glinda, immediately—"

Luna was just about to tell Glinda to "immediately come forth."

But before her partner could materialize, the red dragon shifted its body slightly.

It even exhaled deeply, blowing a gust of wind across the three witches, though it was impossible to tell if it was a snore or a breath.

"Kyah!?"

Hazumi screamed lightly. The wind had startled her.

The red dragon opened its eyes slowly.

Its directed its unfocused gaze at the witches before it.

Luna Francois could read some displeasure, curiosity, and a tiny amount of killing intent from the dragon's eyes. As a serpent-summoning witch and a seasoned warrior, Luna could not possibly mistake the warning signs of danger.

"I think... this dragon resembles Senpai a bit..." Staring at the dragon's eyes intently, Hazumi murmured.

She did not assert directly, but her words were as solemn as a divine oracle conveyed by a priestess. The witch who had obtained goddess power apparently noticed something missed by Luna Francois, the specialist in dark domains.

"It's true that this dragon is completely different from the 'queen' in the past."

Luna sighed and waved her hand.

Miniaturized to around three meters in body length, her partner immediately materialized. The lion leviathan with a dragon head and a goat head on her shoulders appeared. Regarding matters of a magical beast, it would be best to ask a magical beast.

"Glinda, what relationship do you think this dragon has with Harry?"

Luna was dumbfounded in the next instant.

Grrrrrrrrr — — ghhhhhhhhh!

The red dragon growled. Hearing this sound, the miniaturized Glinda shuddered in fright, before vanishing without a trace even though Luna had materialized her on purpose...

" " " !? " " "

The witches sensed it. Just now, the dragon had used its status as a Tyrannos and holder of dragonslaying power to command Glinda to leave immediately. As a vassal serving the bow and twin katana runes, Glinda obeyed her master's orders and dematerialized.

"Haruga-kun!?" "I knew it!" "It really is Harry!?"

Grrrrrrrrr... hhhhhhhhhh.

The red dragon, i.e. Haruga Haruomi, growled again in front of the stunned trio, sounding a bit impatient but lethargic. But that was not all.

Grrrrrrhhhhhhhhgrrrrrrrrhhhhhhhhhhgrrrrrrrrhhhhhhhhh — —

Impossible to understand. Not only Luna, but the other two had no clue either.

Grrh. The red dragon, i.e. Haruga Haruomi, grunted unhappily as though disappointed with the three utterly baffled witches.

"W-What is Haruga-kun saying?"

"There seems to be meaning in his sounds, but I can't understand it at all. Did he forget human language, or he hasn't gotten used to using his vocal cords yet? Assuming dragons use vibrating vocal cords to speak, that is."

"Senpai..."

While her two elders were whispering to each other, Hazumi took a step forward.

Perhaps she was worrying about the young man who had turned into a dragon. The worry in her heart compelled Hazumi to walk towards the giant red monster—Eliciting a roar as a result.

Grrrrrrhhhhsh!

"Kyah!?"

The approaching Hazumi lost strength in her legs due to fright, falling backwards on her bottom.

It was actually not that loud in volume, but the red dragon's acute roar carried magical power, turning into a physical telekinetic force to reject Hazumi.

"I-It's me. I'm Shirasaka! Senpai, don't you recognize me!?"

Hazumi stood up with difficulty and spoke to the red dragon.

The red dragon was still curled up in a lazy sleeping posture, but he opened its jaws slightly, exposing teeth that were as big and sharp as sword, looking very ferocious. He seemed to be declaring to everyone—*I will kill anyone who dares to approach.*

Grrrrrrrrhhhhh.

Another growl. The deep noise was enough to shake the witches to their innards.

Luna sighed and said, "Is he trying to say that he'll punish us if we mess with him...?"

The kindhearted Hazumi did not catch it—Or rather, she was unable to catch it.

But unfortunately, Luna Francois Gregory knew that there was slight intent to kill in the dragon's voice and gaze. If they were to do anything to aggravate him, the red dragon might bite them mercilessly. As birds of a feather, Luna naturally understood.

(I need to call Glinda out again...)

While observing every move of the red dragon that was Haruga Haruomi, she pondered.

To summon Glinda again, this time she must increase the magical power and mental strength of herself and her partner to the very limit so as to prevent interference. However, this would still be a most difficult task.

Because the red dragon swiveled his eyeball, staring at Luna intently.

He was observing her reaction. Under the red dragon's gaze, the master-class witch was frozen from head to foot.

Her throat was parched. The dragon's gaze immobilized her. Luna Francois had never experienced this before.

"S-Sheesh, Harry. You look like you're not in a good mood. Don't you remember me?"

She wanted to feign composure, but her voice went a little off-pitch.

(The situation is bad. I have a dragon's eyes on me...)

Luna gulped. She knew.

The magic of dragonkind was not limited to runes of Ruruk Soun. They used mystic techniques from many systems. In this short amount of time, Luna already witnessed magic that could be activated "simply by looking at the other party" or "simply by breathing"...

Just by looking at her, the dragon's eye was able to keep master-class witch Luna Francois intimidated.

Feeling one's life was threatened in the face of a magic beast, a dragon—The magical power in a dragon's eye amplified the *terror* originating from this, thus pressuring Luna. Of all people, he had to threaten Luna Francois Gregory, Shootdown Ace of the Pacific Ring area. How infuriating.

"I-I willl give you some good loving once you return to normal."

Just as Luna, driven by anger and pride, prepared to face off against the red dragon, i.e. Haruga Haruomi—

"Haruga-kun, I understand..."

Juujouji Orihime walked towards the red dragon with determination on her face.

"You always look lethargic, like you didn't get enough sleep. I-In any case, I'm sure you're trying to say 'let me sleep a bit more' or 'another thirty minutes, okay?' Something like that, right?"

Speaking to the dragon while she walked, her voice was trembling.

Hazumi did not notice the killing intent exuding from the dragon, i.e. Haruga Haruomi, but Luna apparently did. Regrettably, Juujouji Orihime also sensed it vaguely.

Samurai blood ran in the Juujouji family, after all, and every generation had always devoted themselves to the pursuit of martial ideals.

She could sense "that kind of vibe" from the opponent's eyes to some extent.

Even so, Orihime did not stop walking. She forced herself to ignore the fear in her heart. So-called *bushido* meant fearlessness in the face of death. Hence, she was fine. She should be fine.

Step by step, Orihime slowly approached the dragon—

"H-However, we all need you. The one we need none other than you... The one we cherish is you. The one we love is you. Do you understand?"

Speaking softly, she took another step.

She knew. If his transformation into a crimson dragon had turned him into a monster incapable of logic or reason, a carnivore that would show them neither compassion nor consideration, he would rip her apart in less than two seconds, devouring her...

However, even if that was the case...

Juujouji Orihime still did not stop walking.

On further thought, this had always been the case. Despite his vast knowledge and worldly experience, a boy who was great at his job, he had poor social skills and was clumsy and passive in his interactions with others. Without any one guiding him properly, he would immediately retreat into his shell. Quite a difficult character to deal with.

Getting along with such a boy required Orihime to dedicate a lot of thought to him.

Slowly increasing the amount of conversation.

Patiently bringing their hearts closer, bit by bit.

Starting with chatting, communicating about work, then gradually delving into each other's private affairs.

Starting from early spring when she first met him, Orihime had been carefully building up a smooth relationship with the young Mr. Haruga. In addition to caution, she would occasionally employ a bit of forcefulness to bring the two of them closer together.

By the time she knew it, she began to find him very endearing, wanting to be with him forever—

(At first I clearly thought of him as a difficult and exasperating guy.)

However, he had always been a responsible person from the time they first met, although it was also true that he was lacking in charm as a romantic prospect.

(Haruga-kun likes me too... Right? So please, I am begging you. Don't do anything scary—Alright!?)

Five more meters and Orihime would be able to touch the red dragon.

Using feelings of love to distract herself from the fear in her heart, she approached slowly. Approaching.

Four meters remaining. Three meters. It seemed fine. *So Haruga-kun does recognize me...?* Orihime told herself while advancing. However.

Hooooooooooooo!

The red dragon, i.e. Haruga Haruomi, suddenly exhaled brusquely.

This breath carried magical power. It was wind, a wave of "blades" to slice apart everything that rubbed him the wrong way.

"Nee-sama!?" "Orihime-san!"

Her companions cried out in worry.

The magical wind ripped through Orihime's blouse and skirt. There were countless tears all over her clothing, exposing glimpses of the pale skin underneath.

With perfect control and intricate skill, the red dragon only sliced her clothing with the air blades.

There was not even a scratch on her skin.

Was it a warning? Orihime was frozen stiff in fear.

It felt like a close shave with razor blades. Furthermore, within the blink of an eye, the air blades made cuts on Orihime's clothing, one after another... The slightest deviation and let alone her skin, even her blood vessels would have been severed, most likely.

The chest portion of her blouse was also sliced open.

This resulted in a clear view of her cleavage. However, Orihime simply stared blankly at the the dragon that used to be human, even forgetting to cover up her exposed skin.

"Aren't you afraid I'll die if you do something so dangerous...!?"

With great difficulty, she squeezed out a trembling voice.

Orihime was so frightened that she could not even lift a finger, barely managing to stand. It would be perfectly normal to collapse limply or go incontinent from fear.

As a result, she could only gaze at him.

...The red dragon looked back.

He stared at Orihime's face and entire body as though watching for her reaction. From his sharp gaze, one could sense curiosity and sapience.

His eyes were full of energy, making the sleepy look earlier seem like a lie.

At that moment, Orihime suddenly understood.

"Haruga-kun, don't tell me that you are..."

Whenever he showed this kind of gaze, there could be no mistake.

It might be the case this time too. This guess was unfounded, but Orihime had no alternatives. More importantly—

Supposing the expression earlier was an indication of the human nature lingering in his consciousness...

"Y-You always put on an extremely serious face whenever you don't want others to discover you were having dirty thoughts... I-Is that happening again right now...?"

Orihime raised her arms stiffly while asking.

She did that in order to unbutton her blouse. Her heart was beating rapidly from fear and her fingertips kept trembling, forcing her to proceed slowly. Even so, Orihime still unfastened the buttons in sequence from top to bottom.

Then she removed the blouse and the tank top underneath.

She also removed her tattered skirt as quickly as possible, leaving just a set of pure-looking blue underwear. Rather bold of her.

The red dragon's eyeballs turned, staring intently at Orihime's body.

"L-Listen, I have already stripped this far. With no weapons on me, you should know... I have no intention of fighting you, Haruga-kun..."

Understood? A-Also, I think," said Orihime timidly. "You probably enjoy seeing me like this, right—?"

Grrrrrrrrhhhhh.

A low growl came from the dragon's mouth.

She could not tell if he was agreeing or disagreeing. Come to think of it, it was impossible to be certain whether the growl conveyed meaningful words either. However, she decided to take the gamble and go all the way.

"I-I know that erotic things are your favorite. Although as I've said before, it's a bit too soon for us."

One step, followed by another step. Orihime finally started advancing again.

She could feel the breath from the dragon's giant jaws—the flow of air. The memory of her clothing getting sliced reappeared in her mind. However, she did not stop walking.

"Nevertheless, if you wish to return to our side... I would probably feel very thankful and might even think that getting married during high school is fine. Although it is strange to hear myself say this, I am the type who makes decisions on momentary impulse... Of course, I won't force you if you're unwilling, also, we still need Grandfather's permission..."

Currently, the crimson magic beast's big and long snout was right before her eyes.

Making her way here had not been easy. The dragon's eyes were frighteningly serious, sharp and intense.

He was still lying on the ground, curled up.

However, the earlier impression of sleep deprivation was long gone.

He extended his neck, bringing his massive snout, teeth, and lower jaw towards Orihime. Any intent to kill... Unknown. Getting too close made it harder for her to keep abreast with the dragon's overall vibe.

Orihime could feel his breath. Maybe he might use air blades again.

Or devour her in one bite? So frightening. So frightening. However, Orihime steeled her determination and tossed out her last gambling chip.

On her own initiative—She hugged the dragon's snout.

Orihime pressed her voluptuous bust against the dragon's snout, telling him her thoughts softly.

"As I have said many times, I love you so much. Please, I beg you, Haruga-kun, remember...!"

Grrrrrrrrr... hhhhhhhhh.

The response she got was a low growl. Knowing it was imbued with magic, Orihime braced herself. Did the dragon finally deem her a rude human female, deciding to eliminate her?

(Please, God!)

Like most Japanese, Juujouji Orihime visited Shinto shrines on New Year's and attended funerals conducted by Buddhist temples.

Without singular devotion to a single religion, Orihime closed her eyes and prayed to a higher existence of indeterminate religious affiliation, waiting for the impending attack.

Several seconds later, pop. It was the sound of her bra unclasped by telekinesis.

"Eh... Kyah!?"

Alarmed, Orihime let go of the dragon's snout on reflex.

The bra fell to the ground, leaving her upper body completely unclothed. She hastily covered her breasts with her right arm.

"Th-This wouldn't be your doing, Haruga-kun, would it!?"

She questioned the dragon that had almost certainly stared squarely at her upper torso's complete nudity.

Face to face with Orihime, the culprit was showing an aloof expression that read "I don't understand human language." However, he immediately

exhaled with what sounded like affection, actively bringing his giant snout towards her.

"Y-You want me to hug you like this?"

Rather than a dragon, this behavior made him seem more like an affectionate dog.

Orihime could not refuse. She sighed and pressed her magnificent bust against the dragon's snout again, embracing "him" gently.

"My goodness... You are so perverted and exasperating."

She whispered lightly, as though soothing him, with an indulging tone in her voice.

Grrrrrrrrr... hhhhhhhhh.

Another growl. Orihime now understood this was an expression of love. He cared even less for whispering sweet nothings than when he was human, probably because he had turned into a dragon.

Anyway—With this, she could finally try out "that method" now.

"Listen to me. It seems to help you recover your memory when we do things to please you, gradually returning your mind and body to human."

She kissed the dragon's cold scales.

"So, allow me to hug you longer, alright? Although transforming into a dragon is quite cool, I would prefer if you continued being human, Haruga-kun."

Lying down in the middle school courtyard, the red dragon was curled up. On the gigantic body, a human suddenly appeared—That of a teenage boy.

Part 3

The white dragon king, Princess Yukikaze.

Of all the dragons that had attained the rank of dragon king, she was the youngest. Her age was probably less than a thousand. Possibly because of that, there was a slight instability in her powers.

Namely, the ability to transform into a dragon.

Princess Yukikaze usually went around in human form.

However, she was unable to transform into a dragon on her own volition. Only when excited with raging emotions did she naturally turn into the white dragon. Apart from her, there were no dragon kings like that ever.

The Flame Emperor—Red Hannibal—could transform at will.

Pureblooded dragon kings such as the Black Lightning Emperor or the Blue Sea King were incapable of taking human form to begin with.

The youthful Princess Yukikaze's constitution was a little unstable as a dragon. Perhaps it reflected her free and unfettered personality?

However—Instability did not imply it was her weakness.

Princess Yukikaze's unstable constitution was due to her unfettered, outgoing, and whimsical personality. These traits also served as the origin of ambition, vigor, and animated spirit.

Especially when she was also the dragon king who had inherited the Rune of the Arrow.

Some measure of instability did not pose any problem at all, because an arrow's specialty was to fly far, fast, and incisively.

"...I hereby decree to my emblem, the Arrow of Sirius." Finally in dragon form, the white dragon king murmured.

Until two minutes ago, she had been in the sky over Tokyo New Town, engaged in an aerial battle against Pavel Galad who had defeated Haruga Haruomi.

But now, Princess Yukikaze was overlooking the entire islands of Japan, not just Tokyo.

Using her specialty of hyper acceleration to speed up, she reached the boundary between space and the atmosphere all at once. Below her was the blue Pacific Ocean and white cloud cover, as well as the landscape of the eastern Eurasian continent.

Descending from this height for a sneak attack, she would instantly turn her enemy into dust...!

"I, Yukikaze—will now transform into the dragonslaying arrow."

As soon as she spoke, Princess Yukikaze began to descend at high speed.

Instantly breaking the sound barrier, she descended from the sky like lightning.

From the perspective of a ground observer, it would probably be like a blazing meteor crashing down from the sea of stars. The silver dragon occupying New Town's airspace was about to meet her in battle—

At that moment, Pavel Galad was in the sky at an altitude of roughly four hundred meters.

Wielding the dragonslaying sword, he was motionlessly waiting for the dragon king's arrival!

"Choosing to take on my attack instead of fleeing, huh? Silver dragon! How foolish!"

"No, princess! I am convinced that this is the only method to defeat you!"

Princess Yukikaze was rushing in with supersonic speed.

The white dragon king's entire body was enveloped in the pearly glow of imperishable protection. All she needed to do was smash directly into Pavel Galad, then surely the silver dragon's body would be pulverized, turned in billions of scraps of flesh, scattering all over Tokyo New Town.

Pavel Galad swung the sword in his hand down to intercept the supersonic attack of white.

"Sever with haste the inauspicious instruments that begrudges dragons!"

Runes of Ruruk Soun encircled the dragonslaying sword.

"I am the user of the sword of divine alacrity." Increased to godlike speed literally, the sword succeeded in chopping Princess Yukikaze's supersonic descent head on.

Furthermore, the blade was burning with blue-white flames.

Against Princess Yukikaze, Galad was also using strengthening magic with flint as a catalyst!

Unfortunately, the result was rather tragic.

The blazing sword had clashed head on against Haruga Haruomi and the Crimson Queen without losing, despite their increased power. But because Haruga Haruomi had attained a level extremely close to a dragon king's, Pavel Galad did not manage to neutralize the impact completely at the time.

Besides, this time he was up against Princess Yukikaze at maximum speed and momentum.

The destructive power of her charge was probably the highest among all dragon kings—A direct clash between the dragonslaying arrow and sword. Without any suspense, the sword proceeded to lose and blown far away.

He fell. Falling to the ground.

Pavel Gald crashed into a commercial district in New Town.

Sliding along the road with the friction producing sparks, he knocked over a number of buildings and houses—And finally stopped.

"Guh—hahh!?"

Pavel Galad groaned.

The silver dragon also had imperishable protection deployed but when struck by a violent attack, the damage would pass onto the user. In order to sustain the barriers only available to dragon kings and Tyrannoi, the heartmetal was put under heavy strain.

Galad's heartmetal suffered an impact that was painful enough to think his heart ruptured.

Also, the silver dragon was mercilessly wounded by the dragonslaying arrow's residual power that imperishable protection had failed to block. His right forelimb, the one wielding the dragonslaying sword, was severed at the shoulder, blown away to parts unknown.

His right wing and everything below the knee of the right hind leg were also blown off.

Broken, contorted, then fallen off like the forelimb.

"Hohohoho. Even though it was only a single strike, the match has been decided, hasn't it?"

In her white dragon form, the princess landed gallantly, speaking with pride.

Princess Yukikaze was not unscathed either. Swung down with godlike speed, the dragonslaying sword had struck her, though imperishable protection managed to block all of its power. The damage inflicted to the barrier was transmitted to the heartmetal, turning into waves of sharp pain...

That being said, the silver dragon was in no shape to continue the fight. It was Princess Yukikaze's overwhelming victory. However—

"Oh?"

The white dragon king narrowed her eyes.

Something was gathering around the battered Pavel Galad.

These were some of the remains of the thousands of golems wiped out by the Crimson Queen's use of the sun-shooting divine bow. Asphalt, concrete, iron bars, steel plates—The fragments of the minions that the silver dragon had created out of various construction materials.

The remains of the golems began to combine and transform.

This was to reconstitute the right forelimb, hind leg, and wing that the silver dragon had lost.

The final product consisted of ugly limbs and a wing in mixed colors of black, gray, and steel. Pavel Galad's physical body had recovered its original shape for now.

This was alchemy magic that processed the remains of his minions to be reused!

"O silver dragon, you created a new body!?"

"I do not have minions capable of using healing magic. I could not continue the fight unless I resorted to such crude measures."

Pavel Galad was the silver dragon that had inherited the dragonslaying sword.

Previously, he had been a beautiful silver dragon.

But now, the limbs and the wing created from artificial stone and steel were rough in texture with unpleasant colors. There was no unity to speak of and one could even apply the description of ugly. Although he had used alchemy magic to enhance hardness while adding flexibility, thus presenting no problems with functionality...

Princess Yukikaze looked upon his ugly body with pity instead.

Narrowing her dragon eyes, she sighed in praise.

"You wish to fight me to the bitter end, going so far as to pick up the corpses of minions? I, Yukikaze, acknowledge your mettle."

"Furthermore, princess, this is also the only strategy capable of bringing about your demise."

"What are you talking about?"

"Admittedly, taking on your attack resulted in my dismemberment. However, back then... It is true that the dragonslaying sword struck your body."

"....."

During the violent clash just now, Princess Yukikaze had charged, using her own body as the dragonslaying arrow. Pavel Galad had intercepted her using his sword of godlike speed.

A frontal clash. As a result, the silver dragon's body was worse for wear, smashed into a number of pieces.

However, the princess' heartmetal also suffered damage and was still hurting.

"I just have to keep repeating the same move until your heartmetal shatters. In this manner I shall obtain victory."

"Hahahaha. Every time you use your sword to strike me when I have turned into an arrow, your body will gradually crumble, you know? Before my heartmetal ceases to function—"

Princess Yukikaze laughed coldly at her foolish enemy.

"Your body will turn into dust from head to foot, leaving not even a single scale behind. Do you intend to create a new body to swap into every time?"

"Precisely. So long as I can defeat you, giving up my body is nothing to worry about."

"Foolish."

"For me, one who is not a dragon king, to challenge you, Princess Yukikaze, this is the only way."

"Hahahahaha!"

Princess Yukikaze laughed. Unlike the cold laugh earlier, this was laughter of delight.

For elite dragons, the head and the brain were considered *fairly* important organs.

Even if their heads were blown away in one go, so long as the soul and the heartmetal were intact, it would still be barely possible to use the secret arts of Ruruk Soun. Then as long as "a substitute for the brain" was created at super-high speed to replace the lost head, it would still be possible to fight.

However, chances of success were probably no more than 50%.

What a foolish strategy, but if pulled off without a hitch, the gamble would pay off with great efficacy.

For Pavel Galad to challenge Princess Yukikaze right now, this was definitely the only method.

Because unlike Haruga Haruomi, a real dragon king would never be naive enough to be caught unprepared by a bit of trickery...

"Fufufufu. I really enjoy the small acts of cleverness from Haruomi, though your foolishness entertain me too—Hmm?"

Princess Yukikaze did not know if it was because she said his name.

But she suddenly felt a "certain presence." It was the bond with the man of her destiny, which could only be sensed by the successor of the Rune of the Arrow.

"Not only the silver dragon, but did I underestimate you too?"

The young man she sought single-mindedly was apparently recovering his strength rapidly.

To be frank, despite her acknowledgement of his wit and resourcefulness, Princess Yukikaze rated him poorly on the aspects of durability and

willpower to live. Hence, Princess Yukikaze gave up on him the moment she saw him defeated.

Never did she expect—

"Then allow me to offer you another chance. You must satisfy me properly this time, Haruomi," said the white dragon king quietly.

The holder of the dragonslaying arrow was extremely sensitive when it came to the presence of the complementary bow.

Princess Yukikaze used the Rune of the Arrow.

The seal was an oval shape surrounding an acute isosceles triangle.

In fact, this was a pictograph of the star named Sirius by humans on Earth. Incidentally, the Rune of the Sword was based on the three stars in Orion's Belt. The Rune of the Twin Katana was the cross-shaped constellation of Cygnus.

Then there was the Rune of the Bow. Also called the Bow Stars of the Southern Sky.

Its prototype was Canis Major.

The ancient Greeks interpreted the constellation as shaped like a "dog" while the secret archives of Ruruk Soun viewed it as a "bow with a nocked arrow."

Of this bow and arrow in the sky—the part corresponding to the arrowhead was actually Sirius.

Sirius, the brightest star in the sky, was also known as Alpha Canis Majoris.

The constellation, recorded in the secret archives of Ruruk Soun as "a bow and arrow," was viewed as a set even by humans.

Shining together in the sky, that was how close together the two were in position.

Who was going to emerge as the victor? Pavel Galad? Or the one who shared a destiny with the arrow's holder? The time for a decisive battle was drawing near again.

Part 4

Dreams were truly the stuff of self-satisfaction.

Until earlier, it had been a nightmare. Hal—Haruga Haruomi—had finally turned into a dragon, just as he had feared. He had offered many "dragon-like" riddles for the witches to solve when they encountered him by chance, but none of them understood dragon language.

However, Juujouji Orihime came to his side.

Hal was quite violent like a dragon at the time, but she disregarded her own safety and did *that* for him to soothe the displeased dragon—

By the time anyone noticed, Hal had appeared *on top* of the Crimson Queen.

The red dragon king's body was currently coiled up, lying on the ground. The human Haruga Haruomi was lying on top—*near the center of the coiled up body*.

Hal's eyes were spacing out towards Tokyo's blue sky.

His eyes lacked spirit but he had some awareness of the current situation at least. Juujouji Orihime—and it was such a shame that a girl like her was

paired with Hal—*Sharing his bed* was something that could only happen in dreams.

As a side note, she was virtually nude.

(My goodness. Look at that leering face of yours...)

A human should not be able to read a dragon's expression.

However, Orihime said that after looking at the face of Haruga Haruomi when he had transformed into a giant magical beast. Despite scolding him, her tone conveyed indulging affection—It made him feel happy.

Orihime still had some clothing on.

But apart from the underwear covering her hip area, she was not wearing anything.

Almost naked, she was in direct contact with Hal, staying by his side. The warmth from her tender skin was quite comfortable. If he could move, he might hug her body as hard as he could, embracing her tightly.

Unfortunately, Haruga Haruomi was unable to lift even a finger in the dream.

Orihime's figure was miraculous as always, voluptuous yet slender in all the right places, just like a goddess.

She even rubbed cheeks with Hal, casting an extremely gentle gaze upon him. This was already enough to feel her love.

—Such a wonderful dream. I guess I should continue sleeping.

As a self-respecting natural-born adherent of laziness, Haruga Haruomi found this sleeping environment so perfect that he could not help but make

this decision. However, there were even more wonderful things waiting for him.

(Orihime-san, I will help out too.)

(E-Even you, Luna-san, why are you joining in!? A-And looking like that!)

Luna Francois had climbed onto the dragon's coiled up body as well.

She was reclining on the left side of the sleeping Hal, opposite to Orihime who was on his right side. In addition, she was pressing her magnificent body, whose charm surpassed that of the Japanese maiden and school idol, against Hal.

Pushed tightly. Pressure. Squishy bouncy supple softness.

In his dream, Hal enjoyed the sensation of a G-cup bust pressed against him.

Furthermore, Luna Francois was completely nude.

She had removed her usual dress, her brassiere, and the underwear that should be covering her lower body. Even bolder than Orihime.

As a result, Orihime was very flustered, plunged into panic.

(Y-Y-Y-You can help out, sure, we did agree before that we'd satisfy Haruga-kun together so that he can stay human, I also hope the three of us can make equal contributions of effort, it's been like this for the past month too, b-b-b-b-but, umm, haven't you gone too far with stimulation when you look like that!?)

(I don't think you have any right to say that, Orihime-san, when you were the first to strip...)

(I-I am fine. I didn't strip completely! B-But Luna-san, you are *totally naked!*)

(It is all for the sake of my beloved Harry. Also, haven't you earned a lot of credit by being the first one? I don't think I'll make enough impact unless I do this.)

Luna had Hal's left leg clamped between her legs.

The smooth interior sides of the American girl's thighs were not only soft but very elastic. She even tickled Hal mischievously with the soles and tips of her feet.

—Why is my dream catering to my tastes so much!?

The desires dormant in the bottom of his heart were way too wanton. Hal wanted to apologize to everyone in the world. Meanwhile, he also wanted to praise his own delusions and imagination. *Oh well, who cares if I indulge myself a bit in this rare and wonderful dream? Master Freud, the closet pervert in my heart is definitely severe enough to lead to mental illness...*

(I-I want to help too!)

(Oh my, Hazumi-san, you are very driven.)

(W-Wait. H-Hazumi, you're wearing nothing too!?)

(But Nee-sama! Luna-san is doing that too, and I believe that Senpai... Haruomi-senpai definitely prefers it this way!)

(!?)

(Well, I think she's probably right. Given Harry's personality.)

(I totally agree, b-b-b-b-b-but this is still too soon for Hazumi!)

(B-But Senpai is still like this. We need to give him even more pleasure.)

Wow, how did this happen? Hal was deeply aware of how steeped in sin he was.

Even his adorable protege, Shirasaka Hazumi, was appearing in his dream.

Furthermore, she was buck naked, without a shred of clothing on her delicate body.

As expected of Orihime's cousin, a promising future seemed to be in store for her. Her bust was already above average while the curve of her hips was in full view.

Lying on Hal's right side was Orihime while Luna occupied the left.

This left Hazumi with the only choice of taking the position on top of Hal, pressing her light and still maturing body and tender skin against him. The kindhearted junior even reached for Hal's cheek, caressing him gently.

(So cold, so hard... Senpai won't turn back to human like this...)

The maiden's voice was filled with uncertainty and worry.

Next to her, Luna Francois nodded vigorously too.



(Yes... In order to help Harry recover, we need to combine our efforts. This is also for canceling the initial credit you earned, Orihime-san...)

Huh? Hal thought to himself in doubt.

Even Luna and Shirasaka know that I might turn into a dragon?

Only Juujouji was supposed to know—Because this is a dream, did some of the factual details get sloppy?

At that moment, Hal realized.

Lying on top of the queen, the human version of Haruga Haruomi was naked. Under the sunlight, his entire body was glittering brightly, because it was covered by a transparent coating that resembled glass.

Just as Hazumi pointed out, he felt cold and hard to the touch.

By the way, was the towel covering his crotch a considerate touch left by the god of dreams?

(L-Luna-san, you revealed your honest thoughts! M-My goodness. Everyone is acting like cheaters in rock-paper-scissors who play their moves late... I-If that's how you want to play, I too will—)

Orihime was clearly very confused.

The excessively anomalous situation had caused her to lose normal judgment, as evidenced by her rubbing her leg, trying to remove "the final article of clothing" using just her lower body and her hand while lying by Hal's side...

Hal was shocked. Even in a dream, shouldn't she show more propriety?

He was already satisfied. It was time to invoke a gentleman's self-restraint—

In the next instant, Haruga Haruomi's consciousness finally awakened.

"Oh dear, I was having a wonderful dream... Huh?"

Hal cocked his head in puzzlement.

Just woken up, he slowly sat up.

He should be sleeping on his bed at home. Despite having this kind of dream, he thought he had been sleeping in his stuffy and messy study that was also his bedroom.

But right now, Hal was sleeping on a curled up dragon.

In addition, he was naked with only a towel over his crotch.

Orihime was lying by his right side. She had already removed her "final article" down to near her knees. On his left was the *naked* Luna Francois. And he was even straddled by his *naked* junior, Hazumi...

"Haruga-kun, you returned to normal!"

"Sheesh! I was so worried about you, Harry!"

"Th-Thank goodness, Senpai!"

The three girls exclaimed at the same time. Their faces were overjoyed with tears glinting in their eyes.

Surrounded by the witches, Hal tilted his head again. How odd. Were those self-satisfying developments just now not part of a dream...?

"I-I see. I think I get the gist."

In the courtyard of a middle school on the Kiyosu Bridge road, Hal nodded.

Roughly twenty minutes passed after his miraculous awakening. During this time, he hastily searched his surroundings and fortunately found his usual clothing. Hal was now clothed.

In addition, the Crimson Queen was still sleeping behind him.

It looked like the queen had yet to recover her power completely.

"By experiencing human fulfillment, my body and mind reverts from a dragon back to a human. Knowing this, all of you did so much for me..."

"Yes, indeed, Harry," replied Luna Francois with a cool expression.

No longer naked, she was wearing her usual black dress. Orihime and Hazumi had also put on their clothes. However, the two Japanese girls seemed to have recovered their sense of shame and had their heads down, too afraid to look straight at Hal.

"S-Sorry... It looks like I caused a lot of trouble for everyone..."

"Don't let it bother you. At least I was a willing participant. Because—I love you more than anyone in the world."

"Th-That's why I was able to revive?"

"Yes. But in my opinion, what Orihime-san said earlier was very problematic... It sounded like she was your girlfriend, madly in love with you and willing to marry you just like that. I pretended not to hear because it was an emergency just now, but..."

Luna smiled and suddenly started to pursue the matter.

However, the master-class witch's eyes were not smiling. Instead, they showed firm determination that would send Raptors flying with brute force if necessary. Hal suddenly remembered it. Now that she mentioned it, that

scene which he thought was a dream—Orihime had definitely shouted something like that.

Orihime herself was stunned on the spot.

It was probably only now that she remembered her promise to Hal. To avoid causing conflict within the team, their relationship needed to be kept secret for a while...

Even Hazumi was showing shock on her face while looking back and forth between her cousin and Hal.

"Speaking of which, Nee-sama definitely said that just now..."

"Oh, that! Haruga-kun and I are just pure classmates! Although we might be considered a couple whose relationship progressed with lightning speed, and it's not like we didn't discuss dating with an eye for marriage, putting each other into our plans for the future...!"

Orihime lost composure completely.

She was very poor at handling trouble of this sort. Hal found this quite adorable of her and almost failed to suppress the urge to shout, "Sorry for keeping it from all of you. We're actually dating. I feel very attracted to Juujouji, and happily, the feeling is mutual with Juujouji—!"

Hal was an energy-saving human who was extremely lazy in the areas of romance and real life.

Just as he was finally about to tear off this label, Hal suddenly detected "a certain presence."

"Now way... Is she coming?"

It was something that could only be sensed by the successor of the Rune of the Bow—A bond. The holder of the dragonslaying bow was extremely sensitive to the complementary arrow.

The witches also fell silent instantly, probably noticing Hal's nervousness.

Two seconds later, that nostalgic voice, full of vitality, was heard again.

"Haruomi, you survived, didn't you? Whether you or the silver dragon, none of the latest additions to the ranks of the Tyrannoi are to be underestimated!"

Needless to say, what descended from the heavens was Princess Yukikaze's voice.

Part 5

Hal and company were at the courtyard, facing the school yard.

The white dragon king descended leisurely on the school yard. By her side was the other dragon, Hal's old foe Pavel Galad.

"Eh!?"

Hal thought he was imagining things.

The beautiful silver-white body was now a tragic sight.

The right forelimb, right wing, and right hind leg below the knee—All these formerly silver body parts had turned into a disgusting mixed color of black, gray, and steel.

Rough in surface, their forms were also distorted and ugly.

The texture seemed like a pointless alloy created by dumping fragments of concrete and asphalt into molten steel.

"W-What happened to your limbs!?"

"Nothing of particular consequence. I simply sparred with the princess while you were away. Nothing less expected of a dragon king. Had I not mended myself using alchemy magic, I would have lost already," reported Pavel Galad nonchalantly.

On the surface, it looked like Princess Yukikaze had not suffered much injury. Comparing the two dragon's gigantic bodies, Hal sighed. Unless Minadzuki's healing magic was used, Pavel Galad's lost body parts probably could not be restored.

"Remodeling himself as a cyborg huh..."

Hal did not know how to react besides sighing. Sure enough, the minds of the warrior race that was dragonkind were abnormal.

Unwilling to play along with their farce and wanting to "conserve energy" as much as possible, Hal made his suggestion, "Feel free to continue your fight. I'm basically defeated, so you two can just go ahead and decide the winner between yourselves."

"What nonsense are you suggesting? According to convention, we two must fight to the death first as Tyrannoi."

"Precisely. Defeat the opponent on your own level before challenging the king who is I, Yukikaze. Haruomi, this is the trial you must face."

It would be easiest if the two dragons took out each other.

Even though the Tyrannos and the dragon king could not possibly understand Hal's calculative intentions, they flatly rejected Hal's energy-saving plan. Hal had no interest in play along with dragonkind's excessively dangerous foreign culture.

Furthermore, Princess Yukikaze even said casually while still in her dragon form, "However, Pavel Galad was severely injured during his fight with me. For fairness' sake, perhaps I should amputate an arm and a leg of Haruomi's before you two start fighting again..."

"I see, that would be logical."

"H-Hold on a sec! That's definitely unfair, so hear me out, okay!?" Hal instantly pointed at something.

Near the top of the outer wall of this middle school building, there was a large round clock. The old mechanical kind, using a long hand and a short hand to represent time.

The time happened to be 4pm exactly. It was already afternoon.

"I will end our match before the long hand moves from '0' to '5.' If our fight still isn't done by then, the princess can give Galad a hand... How's that!?"

"Oh? You intend to settle our score in merely five minutes?" Pavel Galad nodded. "I see. The longer the fight drags on, the worse the stamina drain on my injured body, which would tip the scales in your favor. You wish to relinquish this advantage on your own?"

"Yeah, that's the idea."

Galad's attitude was surprisingly candid, putting Hal at a bit of a loss.

Elite dragons and dragon kings were capable of understanding all languages on Earth.

Naturally, he could read Arabic numerals. However, the silver dragon had nodded in agreement without needing Hal to explain the "five minutes," a human measuring unit of time—Hal was very surprised.

So this guy even practiced how to read clocks?

Against someone so studious, would *that move* work? However, unconcerned about Hal, Pavel Galad talked to the dragon king on his own.

"I have no objections to Haruga Haruomi's proposal."

"Very well. If you are not opposed to it, I, Yukikaze, have no opinion either. You two can go about it however you wish."

Princess Yukikaze nodded generously and agreed at once.

"The winner shall earn the right to have a rematch with me, Yukikaze. Begin."

The white dragon king declared haughtily and transformed.

Her majestic body instantly shrank, swiftly turning back into the beautiful girl in the one-piece dress. Sitting on her flying surfboard to increase altitude, she approached the round clock that showed the time limit.

"Do your best, Haruomi. I have already witnessed the silver dragon's mettle. It is your turn to exhibit your potential."

The princess' entire being exuded royal authority.

Pavel Galad spread his wings and flew into the sky over the school yard to enter a combat stance.

Left on the ground, Haruga Haruomi sighed and turned to his witch companions.

"...So there you have it. I'm counting on you, everyone."

"Okay, Harry. I will pursue the details later."

"N-Nee-sama, don't tell me you and Senpai..."

"Forget about that for the time being! We need to focus, Hazumi!"

Luna Francois winked at Hal, Hazumi still seemed unsettled, while Orihime remained flustered. Furthermore, Asya's absence was a massive hit to their combat potential. She apparently stayed back alone in Pavel Galad's barrier in order to help her companions escape...

Regardless, the three witches materialized their partners.

The nine-tailed fox-wolf, Akuro-Ou. The three-headed lion, Glinda. The emerald serpentine dragon, Minadzuki.

The three giant beasts, ten-odd meters in body length, appeared.

"Anyway, this should be the final bout, Harry."

"If anything, it's more like the last round when playing mahjong through the whole night." Hal shrugged and replied to Luna. "After all, this is more like gambling than fighting..."

Would the trap he had laid from a flash of inspiration work?

Now that it had come to this, all he could do was believe in the horse he had his bets on.

Also, the incident this time had made Hal realize once again, Haruga Haruomi was not suited to fighting. Unless absolutely necessary, it would be best to avoid acting cool as much as possible...

The Crimson Queen was behind him, curled up in a ball.

Deciding to ignore the fierce and violent nature sleeping within the queen, Hal looked at the clock.

"Four minutes and a bit left... I'm counting on Glinda and Akuro-Ou to handle Galad first. During this time, I'll tell the Crimson Queen to get her

bow and arrow ready. Shirasaka, can Minadzuki's power of healing still be—"

"No problem! It can still be used, though only once!"

"Excellent! Then please help the queen recover!"

While Hal was issuing orders, precious time was ticking away.

The witches reacted swiftly Orihime drew out the power of the Rune of the Twin Katana from Hal where as Luna used the Rune of the Bow, then applied them to their partners.

Akuro-Ou's nine tails—Blades resembling Japanese swords appeared at the tips of her tails.

Glinda's three heads—A cannon protruded out from each mouth of the lion, the dragon, and the goat.

"Akuro-Ou, we have the advantage in blade quantity!"

Orihime was the first to encourage her partner.

Obtaining nine swords instead of two, the fox-wolf rushed into the air to attack Pavel Galad who was waiting in the sky.

Slice. Slice. Slice. Slice. Slice. Slice. Slice. Slice.

Akuro-Ou's nine tails moved freely as though they were made of rubber, even more dexterous than human arms, swinging the nine swords to attack Pavel Galad continuously.

However, the nine blades were all blocked by the dragonslaying sword.

A single longsword. The holy inscription of Ruruk Soun, "I am the user of the sword of divine alacrity," appeared along the sword's blade.

"Hohohoho! How could a mere nine swords prevail against my sword of divine speed!?"

The dragon's roar resounded across the sky.

Luna shouted, "In that case, how about this!?"

Akuro-Ou swiftly retreated to get out of range.

At the same time, Glinda began to fire her cannons at the sky. From the lion, the dragon, and the goat's mouths, the three cannons shot glowing projectiles one after another.

Using imperishable protection—the personal barrier with a pearly glow—Pavel Galad deflected the projectiles of light.

Hal glanced at the clock. Three minutes and five seconds remaining.

The Ruruk Soun runes of "healing hand" appeared over Minadzuki's head.

The emerald serpentine dragon unleashed the magic of healing, to inject vitality into the red dragon that was still curled up on the ground.

The Crimson Queen with the damaged heartmetal finally got up.

She slowly stood on her feet and gradually extended her pair of red wings to the sides.

Her movements were definitely not quick. However, the queen's eyes gradually regained vigor. The massive body, twenty meters long, began to release potent magical power.

The heartmetal, whose magical power output had dropped to 30% or so, gradually increased its rate of output.

From 40% to 50%, then 55%, 60%...

However, this was not yet enough to use techniques of assured annihilation. Defeating his formidable foe would require the strongest attack from the sun-shooting divine bow.

"Senpai! Looks like it will take some time!"

"Don't worry... Akuro-Ou and Glinda will help stall for a while longer..."

Rather than to alleviate Hazumi's worries, Hal's words seemed more directed at himself.

Two minutes and forty seconds left. Orihime finally ordered Akuro-Ou to execute a technique of assured annihilation using her nine swords.

"Akuro-Ou, use fire... No, use sun magic!"

The nine blades sprouted from the fox-wolf's nine tails glowed golden—the sun's radiance—all of them turning into "swords of light."

However, the sword of dragonbane was also burning with blue-white flames!

"O fragments of the flint star, grant me power!"

Pavel Galad recited an incantation while swinging his flaming sword nine times.

The dragonslaying sword's attacks were aimed at Akuro-Ou's nine tails and nine blades. Every time it sliced audibly through the air, a clang would be heard from a sword of light, breaking from the resounding impact.

Next, a critical strike sliced through the white fox-wolf's body.

"A-Akuro-Ou, hurry and disappear!"

Furthermore damage could mean the loss of her partner's life.

Realizing this, Orihime commanded and Akuro-Ou instantly vanished. She had dematerialized. Two minutes and ten seconds remained. But with this development, it meant that there was no longer any worry about friendly fire—A mad barrage began.

"Glinda, fire everything!"

Luna Francois instantly commanded.

The heads of the lion, the dragon, and the goat finally engaged in rapid fire at a rate of thirty shots per second.

The projectiles of light formed a curtain of anti-air fire, with each bullet imbued with the power of dragonbane. Faced against this wave of attacks, Pavel Galad relied on more than just his defense from imperishable protection.

While using the pearly glow to block the projectiles of light, he even used a technique of assured annihilation.

"O god of the sword, fill the blue heavens with the wisdom of Ruruk Soun!"

Thunder clouds gradually blotted out the blue sky. Nineteen runes of Ruruk Soun also appeared in the air. "I summon the thunder god's sword to unsheathe in haste."

The technique of assured annihilation, the thunder god's sword. It was the most powerful mystic technique boasted by the dragonslaying sword.

Gathered in the sky, the thunder clouds kept striking the dragonslaying sword with lightning, successfully charging up the sword of dragonbane with the thunder god's power.

Not only that, but Glinda's sweeping fire of glowing projectiles were also erased by the lightning.

Pavel Galad slowly turned the dragonslaying sword to point at the three-headed lion. Lightning erupted from the sword's tip, striking Glinda's left shoulder—The goat head.

This lightning was also an attack imbued with the power of dragonbane. Further injury would be bad news. Luna clicked her tongue.

"Retreat, Glinda!"

The lion leviathan also dematerialized and left the mundane world.

One minute and thirty seconds remaining. The Crimson Queen was finally ready to fight. Standing imposingly, she glared at the sky—Pavel Galad in the sky.

The dragonslaying bow appeared in her crimson left hand!

"I'm counting on you, queen. Use your full power."

Hal prayed to the queen. Currently, the heartmetal's output of magical power was about 85%.

Not completely revived, but it should be able to draw out enough magical power—An arrow of light appeared in the queen's right hand at last.

Nocking the arrow onto the dragonslaying bow, she drew and released.

"Incoming, the queen's divine bow, huh!?"

"As much as it runs counter to my personality, I'm gonna settle things with you fair and square!"

The arrow shot by the queen produced a vortex of swirling flame in its wake, attacking the silver dragon's body that was no longer smooth.

The aerial target raised his dragonslaying sword up high and swung down. The longsword was currently in an excessively decorated state with both blue fire and massive lightning.

The mystical sword of lightning and fire swung down on to the sun-shooting vortex of conflagration.

The vortex of conflagration was like a tsunami.

It was large enough to easily swallow the ten-odd-meter-long Pavel Galad. Massive threatening tide seemed as though it was going to burn all creation into ash. Currently, the holy words of "I will fire the sun-shooting divine bow at the sky, to exterminate the sun" were glowing radiantly over the Crimson Queen's head.

However, this conflagration failed to burn away the white lightning released by the dragonslaying sword.

Galad was pointing the longsword forward. The blade's body and the lightning acted like Moses' prayer to part the sea, chopping open a gap in the vortex of conflagration. Holding the dragonslaying sword, Pavel Galad was staying unscathed in that gap.

"My heartmetal, pour all power into the dragonslaying sword—!"

"Hang in there! Shirasaka already went out of her way to heal us!"

Galad spoke to the power source inside him while Hal shouted at the Crimson Queen.

In theory, offering encouragement to a heartmetal and the queen was practically pointless. However, this was a battle of limits where each side attempted to overpower the other with their most powerful technique of assured annihilation.

This was a contest of willpower and endurance in addition to magical power and martial force.

Whenever the vortex of fire inched forward, the sword's lightning would push it back. Both sides kept pushing nonstop.

This simple yet intense battle was like two sumo wrestlers pushing each other in a contest of pure strength. Perhaps because of the simplicity in the manner of contest, time was slowly ticking away mercilessly.

One minute and five seconds left. Fifty-five seconds. Fifty seconds. Forty, thirty, twenty-five seconds...

Vying for supremacy just a moment ago, the conflagration and the lightning exhausted their magical power simultaneously and vanished.

"Damn it! Is that the limit...?"

"What comes next is a battle of pure power without relying on my sword or your bow!"

Hal clicked his tongue while Galad shouted with delight.

Twenty seconds remaining. Akuro-Ou and Glinda had exited the stage. The remaining combatant—Hal instantly gestured to her with his eyes. The junior student nodded and replied, "Minadzuki, protect us!"

Rahhhhh—ahhhhhhhhh!

Minadzuki had been maintaining some distance from the sword-swinging Galad in the air. The gentle serpentine dragon bared her fangs ferociously and flew at Pavel Galad.

The mortal rival of silver calmly pointed his sword of choice at the serpentine dragon's face.

A flash of yellow light shot out from the dragonslaying sword's tip. Minadzuki deployed imperishable protection to block the attack, but only fifteen seconds remained until the time limit...

Hal nervously gulped. It was finally about to end.

In fact, he had been using a certain spell the whole time, the Eye that had helped him out so much several hours earlier. This magic offered an overlooking view of the surrounding area, providing "god's eye."

The battlefield was the yard of middle school at Kiyosumi-Shirakawa.

Two high school girls happened to arrive at the school gate at this moment. Their uniforms did not belong to this middle school but to Kogetsu Private Academy—the high school where Hal and his friends attended.

Perhaps the dragon hero was using magic under the same system and saw these two girls.

But Hal was very confident because instinct informed him that Galad's attention and focus were on the Crimson Queen and the hindrance in front of him—the leviathan Minadzuki.

(Galad only targeted the witches because they're my companions—Haruga Haruomi's. Mere "high school girls where you can find anywhere" shouldn't be enough to attract his attention...)

Next, there was the sound of gunfire. Not one shot, but a fully automatic burst.

One of the high school girls—the one wearing her hair in twintails—had slowly taken out a semi-automatic pistol from her schoolbag, then pulled the trigger. This gun was primarily steel in color with golden decoration all over it. Magnificent and rugged in construction.

The rest was Hal's job. He imbued the thirty bullets of light, shot out from the handgun, with magical power.

Dragonslaying power—for piercing Pavel Galad's heart.

The two high school girls were his classmates, Mutou-san and Funaki-san. The pistol was Hal's usual magic gun which he had personally handed over to them earlier. As a result, this task was quite easy.

The thirty dragonslaying bullets reached the silver dragon's chest, striking it, rotating, then burrowing into it.

Normally, the bullets should have been blocked by imperishable protection, but the silver dragon had exhausted his magical power just now in his contest of techniques of assured annihilation with Hal. Pouring all magical power into the technique of assured annihilation had caused his defense to diminish greatly.

"What...?"

Galad was shocked. The pain from his chest told him he had been shot, injured.

He was stunned for only a moment, but this created an irrevocable opening, a perfect opportunity for Hal and Hazumi to attack.

"Shirasaka, counting on you!"

"Y-Yes! Minadzuki, use the Rune of the Bow. Please!"

Their shouts caused the emerald serpentine dragon to roar again.

Minadzuki discharged "laser breath" at Pavel Galad. Furthermore, due to the Rune of the Bow's power, this shot was imbued with the power of dragonbane.

"A-Ahhhhhhhhhhhhhhhh!?"

Struck directly by the dragonslaying laser, Pavel Galad screamed.

Under the light, the silver-white head and body turned into dust and gradually crumbled. The arm, wing, and hind limb with mixed colors of black, gray, and steel were also blown away.

Time remaining: five seconds.

Having exhausted all his power, the successor to the Rune of the Sword vanished from Hal's sight.

Epilogue

"Th-The gorgeous guy dragon disappeared!"

"All we did was bring the gun over... W-Was that enough?"

It was after the silver dragon Pavel Galad had disappeared.

The two "helper" high school girls came over to Hal and the three witches who had exhausted all their energy in a short amount of time.

They were Funaki-san, who had fired the magic gun, and the accompanying Mutou-san.

"You were lifesavers. Really, thank you very much," Hal thanked them sincerely.

The reason why he had handed the magic gun to fellow club members who had entered the combat zone was because it suddenly occurred to him that "when a nearby high school student opens fire on him without warning, even Galad would be startled, right?" as well as—A bit of pride.

Galad had definitely studied Haruga Haruomi and his allies, the witches, in depth, and apparently learned quite a lot of knowledge about human society.

But no matter how enthusiastic a learner he was, Pavel Galad was ultimately still a dragon hero who loved battle. How serious could his interest in "humans" be...?

Wanting to send Galad the message "don't underestimate humans," he had given his magic gun to his fellow club members.

Regardless of the gun's location, Hal could instantly sense it and remotely imbue it with magical power. If necessary, he could summon it with a single

thought. At the time, he had entrusted Funaki-san with the magic gun on a momentary whim as insurance.

Unexpectedly, he was roped into a return match, and with a handicap condition to boot.

Hal had no choice but to turn his "momentary whim" into a "trump card." As a result, he had to create a situation where he and Galad were pitting their techniques of assured annihilation against each other at least, so he proposed the five minute deadline rule in attempt to make effective use of the "passing high school girls."

"Luckily, that guy accepted my suggestion..."

It was a great gamble combining all kinds of factors.

He had asked the Mutou-Funaki team to standby near the Kiyosu Bridge road. After Orihime and the girls saved him from his dragon transformation, the Mutou-Funaki team had rushed over to the school in five minutes.

More importantly, there was a secret hero behind the scenes.

"Here's your gun back! I've never seen a magic gun that talks and tells me what to do. It made me jump in surprise!"

"It was pretty haughty. And quite amusing too."

"Hahahahaha."

Mutou-san chimed with a comment while Funaki-san handed the magic gun over.

Laughing artificially, Hal accepted the gun. The great guardian of the magic gun who had led the way for the two high school girls spoke directly to his mind.

(Brat, know that I do not mind if you were to prostrate yourself with tears of joy to express your gratitude.)

(I'm surprised you can say that so brazenly. While I was a dragon, it seemed like you were enjoying the show quite a bit.)

(Kukukuku. After all, it had nothing to do with me. A perfect way to kill time.)

Residing in the magic gun, the former dragon king Hinokagutsuchi replied conceitedly.

That being said, she still agreed to Hal's request to bring his two classmates and the magic gun over here while he was fighting Pavel Galad. *I guess I could let it slide this once?*

"By the way, what happened to Sakuraba-senpai?"

"Well, as you know already, he values gathering data even more than his own life."

"He said he had to capture the battle just now as photos and videos... So lugging his equipment, he ran up to a building's rooftop~ What amazing perseverance," replied Mutou-san with a wry smile.

On the other hand, Funaki-san looked very impressed.

Hal laughed in response too while thinking about another question. After the match was decided, that dragon king girl should be flying over here instantly in all likelihood—Princess Yukikaze—*But why hasn't she come to find me yet?*

In the next instant...

The three witches, who had used up a great deal of their stamina in battle after battle, looked up in surprise.

"Senpai, look!"

"The magic of dragons can even do that!?"

"Harry, it looks like... We haven't won yet!"

Sudden warnings. Their gazes were directed towards an unexpected revival ritual.

Particles as tiny as sand were gathering at a point in the sky to create a dragonoid form. A body reaching ten-odd meters in length, a long and thick tail, sharp teeth—It reached completion swiftly in ten seconds.

"Pavel Galad huh...?" Hal said quietly.

The dragon manifested in the sky was very similar to his old foe.

However, the beautiful body of lustrous silver-white was no longer.

The revived Pavel Galad's body featured an ugly surface color of black, gray, and steel. No part of it was smooth. It was like an alloy forcibly mixed and created by pouring concrete and asphalt fragments into molten steel—

"The instant he suffered the critical blow, he used those materials to forge a new body!?"

"Hohohoho, correct, Haruga Haruomi. This magic is difficult to control... I only succeeded after going through great trouble, so it is with relief from the bottom of my heart that I sigh now. It would appear that the curtain has yet to fall for our duel."

The indomitable warrior smiled with satisfaction using his grotesque body. Should he be called a dragon or a combat automaton made in the shape of a dragon? Regardless, Pavel Galad's tenacity and magical power had reached frightening levels.

Naturally, the xenomorphic dragon was holding the dragonslaying sword.

The match had yet to be decided—which was why Princess Yukikaze did not arrive.

Hal gasped. Would he be able to emerge victorious? Since the enemy had used such reckless means to revive, he should be in poor shape, but Hal's magical power was in short supply too, making him akin to an empty shell.

The remaining leviathan, Minadzuki, could not use pseudo-divinity again either.

The only option was entrust fate to Haruga Haruomi's marionette—the Crimson Queen.

However, the body was no longer a simple puppet. Probably sensing Hal's nervousness, the queen opened her jaws slightly, growling so softly that one had to listen carefully to pick it up.

The soul inhabiting the Crimson Queen—the basic instinct of dragonkind began to awaken.

Fighting in such a state, would what happened earlier repeat itself...?

The Tyrannos of the sword, who had gone as far as to replace his entire body, said to the terrified Hal, "Although the time limit you actively proposed has passed, I also substantial time on my revival, so both sides are at fault. Now let us restart—"

Galad probably wanted to say "restart the battle."

But he did not get to finish his sentence. Instead, a noise resounded all around.

—Cling clang cling clang clang clang clang clang clang clang!

It was the metallic sound of chain links bumping against one another. Five chains flew in from the sky, entangling Pavel Galad's neck, right elbow, left elbow, right knee, and left knee.

Then a girl's adorable voice read out holy words of death.

"I hereby pray to my seal that shines in the sky, the Chain of Heavenly Imprisonment. This time, that dragon that narrowly escaped death—Send him to hell."

These were command words.

In the next instant, the five chains effortlessly dismembered Pavel Galad's body, tearing him apart.

The head and limbs of the xenomorphic dragon, formerly silver, flew in the sky.

Next, as though adding a finishing blow, a shot of laser breath struck Galad's chest—the location where the heartmetal lay dormant—thoroughly eliminating any possibility of revival.

Witnessing the entire process, Hal muttered to himself, "Rushalka...?"

It was the blue wyvern that had delivered the finishing blow to Galad.

She suddenly materialized in the air over the middle school's yard that had become a battlefield. Adorning Europe's strongest leviathan's head like a crown were runes of Ruruk Soun.

A total of sixteen symbols, signifying "O jailer of heavenly imprisonment and chain of the executioner, accomplish your second mission."

The five chains that had killed Pavel Galad were shot from around the center of this series of runes.

"You are too careless, Haruomi. What's the point of cornering the target if you're going to let him revive? That's why amateurs are such a pain."

With wings outspread, Rushalka was waiting in the sky.

The girl directly under her lectured Hal. This was frank advice from a combat expert, the silver-haired witch dressed in a durable military jacket.

"Asya-san!?" "Asya!?" "You're okay!"

Seeing their companion return safe and sound, Orihime, Luna, and Hazumi were very emotional.

Asya raised her hand lightly in acknowledgement and quickly walked over to Hal.

"Asya... Thank goodness you're okay, but that rune is—"

"That one, the dragonslaying rune you guys retrieved from the Dragon Palace Court, belonging to the former dragon king called the Gray Aristocrat. I dug it out and recycled it," said Asya calmly.

Of course, Hal was intrigued.

"Don't you need that kind of stone to activate a dragonslaying rune!?"

"That's right. It's all thanks to Pavel Galad stockpiling those flints—secret treasures of the sea of stars. I stole a couple of those stones from the deepest part of his barrier and returned to Earth, then went to school to find the

dragonslaying rune kept in underground storage. I'm glad I rushed like mad, because I barely got here in time at the critical moment."

After explaining how things happened, Asya showed a weary expression.

"But pushing myself this much made me hungry. Got any food?"

"Nope. I don't carry extra food around."

"Haruomi, how can you be so useless when you're my childhood friend...?"

"Don't you keep emergency rations on your person? Why not eat that?"

"Finished it a long time ago. Right now, I need to replenish at least nine thousand calories of nutrition."

"At least ninety thousand, if you ask me."

In other words, Asya had become a Tyrannos just like Hal.

Incredibly, upon seeing his childhood friend who by all logic should have changed a lot, Hal felt a wave of nostalgia instead.

Probably because there were no signs of Asya's recent nonchalant spate of inexplicably feminine behavior. And her appetite too. Genius Asya's outstanding magical power originated from excess intake of food—This hypothesis was very well-known in SAURU.

Hal nodded firmly.

He even thought, *Now this is truly Haruga Haruomi's childhood friend.*

However, many questions surfaced in his mind. He had not sensed Asya using the Rune of the Twin Katana single-handedly at all. How did she return to Earth? Trying to claim someone else's dragonslaying rune as your

own was supposed to have a very low success rate. Did she succeed by luck alone?

But these questions had to wait until later.

"Haruomi, the great demon lord is about to descend at a last..."

"Yeah. Coming at me one after another, I really wish they'd give me a break..."

The white dragon king slowly descended upon the school yard where Hal and the others were.

Wearing a one-piece dress of pure white, the beautiful maiden was standing on her flying surfboard. Princess Yukikaze, the dragon king who had inherited the Rune of the Arrow.

"Fufufufufu. Haruomi, you have finally earned the right to stand before me. I, Yukikaze, almost gave up on you!"

Back when he returned to Tokyo New Town after an absence of three years, never in his wildest dreams did Hal expect this future to be in store for him.

To think that he would embark on an adventure revolving around the threats to mankind that were dragonkind and the dragonslaying runes. He had been in the presence of dragon kings so many times that he had lost count.

However, Hal had a feeling. What was about to start would be the most intense battle to date.

Uncertainty and fear surged in his heart. Hal straightened his back and gazed straight at the white dragon princess' adorable and beautiful face.

Afterword

Hello everyone, it's been a while.

Following Volume 6 after a bit of a gap, Volume 7 is finally for sale.

"Although 'the insiders' were involved in the production of a drama CD, so the blank period doesn't feel real to me~"

...You showed up at the beginning this time, Asya-san. Matter-of-factly too.

"What's the problem? It's not like we're strangers."

I was thinking, since it's already the seventh volume, perhaps I should ask Luna-san or someone else to appear, to break the mold, so to speak...

"What!? Why ask Luna!?"

Purely an idea on whim. I think it's time to change the format of the afterword.

"Objection! This afterword is basically my sanctuary!"

Last volume, I used your sanctuary as a playground, so what are you getting so hung up about by now?

Well, switching people so suddenly is a bit much, so let's continue like this.

"That's right! Nice thinking!"

Many events have taken place to push the main plot into the climax.

But let's put that aside for now while we're in the afterword and have a chat with Asya-san instead.

"Then let's advertise what is being sold simultaneously with this book."

Yes, right on it. The drama CD "Haruga Haruomi on Holiday with the Witches" that's being bundled together with Volume 7, right? Exclusively sold by Japan's Comic Toranoana—

"Although that's very important too, don't forget the other product. Didn't they start selling a well-received body pillow of me—Asya—not too long ago?"

Eh... Ohhh. That definitely exists.

"What's with the lack of enthusiasm!?"

Oh dear. I can't believe they produced a body pillow for a character who clearly doesn't provide much practicality in that area. I think it's very challenging and admirable. But this also raises a purely academic question on my part, I wonder how much demand is there in the market for this product... (wry smile)

"Of course it will be wildly popular! It's an alluring item that allows a super beautiful maiden like me to descend upon your bed, keeping you company at night!"

There you have it, the well-received new product on sale, catching the eye of everyone involved. Interested readers, please consider purchasing it!

"So, it's time to talk about the drama CD!"

This is exclusively sold at Toranoana, but apparently you can also order online from major shopping platforms to have them buy from Toranoana.

The script was written by the original work's author—me.

"Also! They even succeeded in hiring Tange Sakura to voice me—!"

Asya Tange Sakura-san

Haruga Haruomi Saiga Mitsuki-san

Orihime Saitou Yuka-san

Hazumi Yahagi Sayuri-san

Luna Francois Niina Ayano-san

Hinokagutsuchi Hirohashi Ryou-san

The above voice actors form the cast list.

The bonus booklet also includes little anecdotes about casting and recording, presented as short skits—or rather, dialogue form.

"It's that thing that appeared together with President M and me. It also covers the reason why the president didn't appear in the drama CD. And then the all-important plot of the drama CD..."

The content is quite slice-of-life.

The story is about the usual gang visiting a public bath (not a hot spring).

"That's definitely quite slice-of-life, to go to this kind of place that's not very special, instead of a hot spring."

But there are many parts that are worth a listen. Like a certain character whose sweet voice reads out a poem to set your heart pounding, a gourmet who skips class, and the ultimate combo of massages and debauchery.

If interested, dear readers, please do purchase it to check it out.

Due to the plot moving towards the climax, in this volume, there is a trend of decreasing levity. Perhaps pairing with the drama CD would give a pretty good balance.

"Will the next volume finally be the showdown against Princess Yukikaze?"

Not just in combat. My plan is to let this true heroine show off her true skills in the romantic comedy arena at last. From there, I'm thinking of charging full steam ahead to the finish line in one breath, so if possible, let us meet again with Volume 8!